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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Petrol, diesel, CNG prices hiked for 3rd time in 10 days

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Petrol and diesel prices were raised again by state-owned firms on Saturday, taking the cumulative increase in retail fuel rates to nearly Rs 5 a litre in under 10 days.

Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) prices were also raised for the third time in recent days, by Re 1 per kg, taking the cumulative hike to Rs 4 per kg.

Petrol price was increased by 87 paise in Delhi to Rs 99.51 per litre. Diesel prices were hiked by 91 paise to Rs 92.49 a litre. Petrol at Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) pumps in Mumbai now costs Rs 108.49 per litre and diesel Rs 95.02. Kolkata prices rose to Rs 110.64 and Rs 97.02, respectively. Petrol prices in Bengaluru now stand at Rs 108.09, and diesel at Rs 95.99.

Prices vary across states due to local taxes.

Private fuel retailers like Nayara Energy and Shell have matched these price increases, adding them on top of earlier hikes. Jio-BP has, however, moved rates at its pumps in tandem with PSUs.

The back-to-back increases come after global crude oil prices surged more than 50 per cent since late February due to the US-Israeli strikes on Iran, and disruptions to shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global oil transit route. The conflict has led to tightening refining margins and a weaker rupee, which have sharply raised the cost of imports.

The move has stoked concerns over inflation and higher transportation costs across the economy. The opposition has accused the central government of delaying hikes until after key state elections. *—PTI*

India-B'desh guards face-off near int'l border

COOCHBEHAR, 22 MAY

Personnel from India's Border Security Force (BSF) and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) were allegedly involved in a tense standoff near the Patgram-Lalmonirhat international border in Coochbehar district on Thursday. This was after BSF and Indian government officials attempted to place a pillar along the border to formally demarcate the international boundary line.

BGB personnel intervened to halt the work, saying no structure can be built within 150 yards of the border per international law. A senior BGB official confirmed the incident and said that an official protest was lodged.

The incident has risen to a diplomatic issue, with Indian security experts and political observers reportedly demanding a firm response from New Delhi. *—SALAR NEWS*

10-yr-old girl abducted, raped and killed in TN; 2 held

Was kidnapped while playing near her home

COIMBATORE/CHENNAI, 23 MAY

A 10-year-old girl has been sexually assaulted and brutally killed in Coimbatore, sending a shock across Tamil Nadu and creating outrage among people.

Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay on Saturday promised strict action in the matter following opposition uproar.

A 33-year-old man, who allegedly committed sexual assault has been arrested under POCSO and for other offences including murder along with his accomplice for criminal conspiracy, police said.

Terming the incident as "horrific," CM Vijay said such inhuman and unforgivable criminal acts can never be tolerated. "I share my deepest condolences with the family of the girl," he said in a statement.

Referring to the arrest of the two persons, he said the Tamil Nadu government will act firmly to ensure that those who engage in such heinous acts against women and children receive severe punishment under the law.

Police said the girl, who was playing outside her house under the Sulur Police Station limits near Coimbatore went missing on 21 May by 5pm. A complaint was received by 8.30pm that day and a case was registered.

The two arrested are Mohanraj and Karthik *—X/COVAIPS*

The prime accused was arrested from his hideout in an apartment complex. During interrogation, the accused, a native of Nagapattinam district and an acquaintance of the victim's family, confessed to luring and taking away the child and strangling her to death after sexually assaulting her.

Meanwhile, the National Commission for Women has said it has taken cognizance of the incident and sought from the Tamil Nadu DGP, a detailed Action Taken Report within seven days.

Opposition leaders -- DMK's Udhayanidhi Stalin, AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami, AMMK chief TTV Dhinakaran and PMK leader Anbumani Ramadoss strongly condemned the crime and demanded tough action.

"This heinous incident has sent shockwaves across the country. The voice demanding true justice for this murder is echoing from all quarters", Udhayanidhi, the Leader of Opposition, wrote on his social media page. A resolution adopted at a DMK Youth Wing consultative meeting here slammed the TVK government *—PTI*

Rubio meets Modi amid energy crisis

US' Marco Rubio meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi *—PTI*

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

India and the United States will continue to work closely for the global good, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday after holding talks with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who briefed him on the West Asia crisis and discussed cooperation in defence, strategic technologies, trade and energy security.

Rubio arrived in New Delhi on Saturday for his first official visit to India, in a trip widely seen as an attempt to recalibrate bilateral ties that have faced headwinds since mid-last year.

He met Prime Minister Modi shortly after landing and extended an invitation on behalf of US President Donald Trump for the Prime Minister to visit the White House in the "near future," according to US Ambassador Sergio Gor.

The US State Department said Rubio and Modi agreed to deepen cooperation in trade and defence and accelerate collaboration in critical and emerging technologies. An Indian readout said Rubio briefed the Prime Minister on "sustained progress in bilateral cooperation across a wide range of sectors," including defence, strategic technologies, trade and investment, energy security, connectivity, education and people-to-people ties.

The visit comes amid heightened global energy uncertainty triggered by the Iran conflict, which has disrupted energy flows through the Strait of Hormuz.

Nearly 20 per cent of global oil and gas passes through the narrow waterway, and India — importing over 80 per cent of its energy needs — has been significantly affected, with almost half its crude imports typically routed through the strait. *—PTI*

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16 DIE DUE TO HEATWAVE IN TELANGANA

HYDERABAD, 23 MAY

At least 16 people have died due to the ongoing heatwave in Telangana, Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy said on Friday. He said the deaths were reported across seven districts.

The minister announced an ex-gratia compensation of Rs 4 lakh to the families of the deceased. Officials have been instructed to ensure the availability of drinking water, buttermilk and ORS packets at bus stations, markets and other crowded public places, particularly where labourers gather. Meanwhile, doctors have warned that the intensifying heatwave is not only causing dehydration and fatigue but is also affecting neurological and eye health. Health experts said hospitals are reporting increased cases of severe headaches, dizziness, fainting, migraine flare-ups and heat-related neurological complications, particularly among children and the elderly.

Neurologists cautioned that dehydration and prolonged sun exposure can disturb brain function and electrolyte balance.

Eye specialists also reported a rise in irritation, dryness, allergic conjunctivitis and corneal sunburns due to dust, hot winds and excessive sunlight. *—PTI*

Mob attacks men inquiring about cattle in B'luru

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

Two men were allegedly assaulted by an unidentified group during an investigation into illegal cattle and camel transport at Medimallasandra village, police said. The incident happened late Friday night under Anugondanahalli Police Station limits. The complaint was lodged by Sanjay Kulkarni, an Honorary Animal Welfare Officer with the Animal Welfare Board of India. The FIR states that Kulkarni received information about over 20 camels and several cows kept for slaughter during Bakrid. Visiting the site at 2.15 am, the animals had reportedly been moved. The group shouted at them, and at a nearby plywood factory, 10 cows were found illegally kept. The attackers assaulted Kulkarni and his volunteer with fists, stones, and weapons, causing injuries. *—PTI*

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—ANI

Encounter breaks out during major search in Rajouri

JAMMU, 23 MAY

Security forces engaged in an encounter following a large cordon-and-search operation in Rajouri district, Jammu and Kashmir, after reports of suspected terrorist movement, officials said. The movement of two to three terrorists was suspected in the area. The White Knight Corps stated that contact was made around 11.30am with terrorists in Gambhir Mughlan during an intelligence-based joint operation with police and CRPF. The troops responded swiftly, resulting in a firefight, and a cordon was established. The operation, called 'Op Sheruwali', remains underway. Reinforcements have been deployed, and searches are ongoing. *—PTI*

ICONIC LUTYENS CLUB NO MORE

Govt asks elite Delhi Gymkhana Club to vacate

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Centre has directed the Delhi Gymkhana Club in Lutyens' Delhi to hand over its premises by 5 June, citing the requirement of the 27.3-acre property for "strengthening and securing defence infrastructure".

The order, issued by Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, said the site in a highly sensitive and strategic zone of the capital is critically required for defence infrastructure.

Located on Safdarjung Road in the heart of Lutyens' Delhi and close to the Prime Minister's residence on Lok Kalyan Marg, the premises were leased to the Imperial Delhi Gymkhana Club Ltd for social and sporting use.

Founded in 1913 as the Imperial Delhi Gymkhana Club, the institution was established as a social space for Britishers. After Independence, the term "Imperial" was dropped, but its elite character and traditions largely remained intact.

Spread over nearly 27 acres, the club was designed by British architect Robert Tor Russell and features extensive sporting and recreational facilities, including 26 grass tennis courts, seven clay courts, squash and badminton courts, a billiards room, and a covered swimming pool.

With around 1,200 members, including senior bureaucrats, military chiefs, diplomats, judges, politicians and industrialists, the club has long been associated with exclusivity and privilege. Membership is highly restricted, with waiting periods extending up to 20–30 years. *—PTI*

SALT LAKE LOSES ITS LEGS

West Bengal government demolished the controversial sculpture outside Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata. Installed ahead of the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup by Mamata Banerjee's govt, the structure featuring oversized footballers' legs, drew criticism from fans, who described it as 'bizarre' and 'ugly' *—SCREENGRAB*

GBA to implement SC order on stray dogs

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

The Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) said it will implement the Supreme Court order to manage stray dog populations and ensure public safety in public spaces.

The Supreme Court's allowed authorities to remove free-ranging stray dogs from sensitive locations such as schools, hospitals, sports complexes, bus stands and railway stations. It further permits euthanasia in cases involving rabid, incurably ill, or demonstrably dangerous and aggressive dogs, subject to due veterinary assessment.

Chief Commissioner Maheshwar Rao said the GBA will enforce these directions in line with the Animal Welfare Board of India's Standard Operating Procedures. Under the plan, stray dogs found within educational institutions, hospitals and other public facilities will be relocated to authorised shelters. Shelters are being developed across the five city corporations under GBA jurisdiction, with the selection of service providers for their maintenance currently underway.

In cases of repeated dog-bite incidents or aggressive behaviour posing a public safety risk, action will be taken based on certification from expert veterinary officers.

Meanwhile, A female student, Meghana, was attacked by more than 15 stray dogs in Hoysala Nagar near Ramamurthy Nagar on Saturday. *—Salar News*

'INSTAGRAM HANDLE HACKED'

CJP Founder claims govt blocked website

NEW DELHI/T'PURAM, 23 MAY

Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke on Saturday alleged a crackdown on the satirical digital outfit, saying it does not have access to any of its social media accounts following a series of government takedowns and hacking incidents.

In a post on X, he claimed his personal Instagram account has also been hacked.

This comes a day two days after the CJP's account on X was withheld in India and Dipke created a new one.

The outfit on Friday launched a campaign seeking Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation over alleged systemic failures in the education sector and the NEET-UG 2026 paper "leak". Later in the day, Dipke claimed that he was receiving death threats and shared screenshots of the threat messages.

Dipke listed what he described as coordinated action against the movement.

Meanwhile, in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala BJP president Rajeev Chandrasekhar has alleged that the "Cockroach Party", a satirical digital outfit was part of a cross-border "influence operation" aimed at destabilising India and targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government.

He further claimed that India's rise and modernisation under Modi's leadership had created resentment among several countries and vested interests. The Bengaluru City Police on Friday had said that no permission for "peaceful human chain" programme by "Cockroach Janta Party Karnataka" for 24 May had been granted. *—PTI*

> **I am very impressed that the youth of India wanted to bring out their frustration in such a creative way -- not on the streets with stones... The government should take the message -- don't kill the messenger. If we kill the messenger, the message will not end**
>
> -Sonam Wangchuk, Environmentalist and educationist

> **Now, the 'Cockroach Janta Party' is not on Instagram anymore, their account has been suspended. The big thing is that 49 per cent of followers of the 'Cockroach Janta Party' on social media are from Pakistan, while only 9 per cent are from India."**
>
> -Sukanta Majumdar, BJP's Union Minister

Anekal to get 2nd largest cricket ground

After Chinaswamy stampede, CM says City needs the Rs 943 crore stadium

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday laid the foundation stone for an international-standard cricket stadium at Suryanagar in Anekal taluk on Bengaluru outskirts.

Siddaramaiah said that an international-standard cricket stadium, which is set to become the second largest cricket park in India after Narendra Modi Stadium in Gujarat, was necessary after the stampede near the Chinnaswamy Stadium last year.

At least 11 people were killed and scores of others injured during a stampede on 4 June during the RCB victory celebrations last year.

"Until now, Bengaluru City and the State did not have an international-standard cricket stadium. Today, at an estimated cost of around Rs 943 crore, the State government is constructing an international-standard cricket stadium in Suryanagar layout in Anekal taluk," Siddaramaiah said while addressing a gathering at the event.

The model for the 80,000 seater Anekal stadium; Chief Minister Siddaramaiah plays cricket during the foundation stone laying ceremony with his colleagues —*MOHAMMED ASAD/X@SIDDARAMAIAH*

The stadium project is being undertaken jointly by the Housing Department and the Karnataka Housing Board (KHB), and is expected to have a seating capacity of around 80,000. With the construction of such an international-standard stadium, tourism in this region will grow and the economy of the surrounding villages will also improve, the CM said.

> **This international cricket stadium is essential. In future, this entire area will become a sports village**
>
> -Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

"People from your village told me that land prices, which were around Rs 1,500 per square foot earlier, have now increased to Rs 4,000-Rs 5,000 per square foot because an international stadium is coming up," Siddaramaiah claimed.

He added the project would be built entirely using KHB funds without government financial assistance.

He said the Housing Board expected to generate nearly Rs 20,000 crore through auctioning vacant sites. There is around 4,000 acres of land in Suryanagar, he claimed. Only 75 acres will be used for the cricket stadium, he said.

Notably there has been major pushback over the stadium, with activists and political leaders flagging environmental concerns as well as reports of a "real estate scam".

However, Siddaramaiah asserted that the government was committed to providing affordable housing.

"Today, buying sites or constructing houses in Bengaluru and its surrounding areas has become very difficult because land prices have increased enormously.

Yet the Housing Board is providing sites and houses at affordable rates for citizens," he claimed. —*PTI*

ESTIMATED COST: RS 20,000 CR

Cabinet to consider DPR for Metro to Tumakuru: HM

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara said that a Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the proposed Metro Rail line to Tumakuru from the Madavara stop in Bengaluru has been received by Vidhana Soudha and would be placed before the Cabinet for consideration.

Speaking to reporters after receiving the DPR with in the presence of Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh, Home Department Additional Chief Secretary Tushar Girinath and BMRCL officials, Parameshwara said that a feasibility report was conducted at the cost of Rs 3.5 crore by a Hyderabad-based company for the proposed project.

"They strongly stated in the report that it could be done," the Tumakuru district in-charge Minister.

The minister said discussions were subsequently held on preparing the DPR and a tender was floated through the metro authorities.

The government is preparing to implement the project under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, with an estimated cost of around Rs 20,000 crore, Parameshwara said.

He added that the DPR contains detailed aspects, including the number and location of stations and the alignment along the National Highway corridor.

"It will be placed before the Cabinet, after which Expressions of Interest will be invited and tenders will be floated.

The process will then begin. We do not yet know who will qualify or who will apply," he said. —*PTI*

Home Minister G Parameswhara, Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh, and others recieve the DPR, at Vidhana Soudha —*X @DRPARAMESHWARA*

Suryakiran aerobatic team to celebrate its 30th anniversary in Bidar

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

The Indian Air Force's Suryakiran Aerobatic Team will celebrate its 30th anniversary at Air Force Station Bidar on May 26, officials said on Saturday.

Known as the "Ambassadors of the Indian Air Force", the nine-aircraft aerobatic team was formed in May1 9 9 6 and made its public debut in Coimbatore later that year using Kiran Mk-II aircraft.

Over three decades, the team has conducted more than 800 air displays in India and abroad, including in China, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore and the UAE.

Officials said the celebrations will honour the contribution of pilots and personnel who helped establish Suryakiran among the world's leading aerobatic teams. —*PTI*

Gruha Lakshmi funds not disbursed for 2 months: Nikhil

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

JD(S) leader Nikhil Kumaraswamy on Friday alleged large-scale irregularities in the implementation of the State government's Gruha Lakshmi scheme and questioned the delay in the release of pending instalments to beneficiaries.

Addressing a press conference at JP Bhavan in Bengaluru, Nikhil alleged: "For 2024-25, instalments were paid for ten months. The amounts for February and March have not been released. That is nearly Rs 5,000 crore. A provision was shown in the budget. But the money has not been paid. At least tell us when this money will be given. Or if it has been used elsewhere, then show the accounts."

Attacking Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's guarantee model, Nikhil "Ministers (in the Assembly) have not answered about the two missing months' payments," and questioned where the money has gone.

He alleged that since the launch of the programme, 21 instalments should have been paid, but only 18 instalments had been released. He noted that beneficiaries had filed a PIL in the High Court. —*ANI*

5 die in head on crash in Kalaburagi

KALABURAGI, 23 MAY

Five people have been killed after a cruiser vehicle they were travelling in collided head-on with a lorry in Kalaburagi, police said on Saturday.

The accident occurred on National Highway 150 near Ladlapur village in Chittapur taluk of Kalaburagi district late Friday night, they said.

The deceased– all related to each other – were identified as Tolusab Kashwar, 27; Hussain Shah, 48; Maibub Ali, 45: Rasul Bee (42), and Fatima Ali, 38; all residents of Ingalagi village in Chittapur taluk.

According to police, a relative of the victims had reportedly developed pneumonia-related complications on Friday night, following which eight persons travelled in the cruiser vehicle to get him admitted in a hospital in Yadgir city.

After he was admitted, five people, including the driver, were returning home when the accident occurred at around 11.40 pm. A lorry from Tamil Nadu, coming from the opposite direction, allegedly collided head-on with the cruiser vehicle. All in the cruiser vehicle died on the spot, a senior police officer said.

The impact of the collision was so severe that the front portion of the cruiser vehicle was completely crushed, he said.

Police said the lorry driver fled the scene after the accident.

A case has been registered at Wadi Police Station, and further investigation is underway. The bodies were shifted to the Wadi Government Community Health Centre for post-mortem examination, they added. – *Salar News*

The accident in Chittapur taluk on Saturday occured when a cruiser vehicle collided head on with a lorry —*SALAR*

GOVT OFFICER ATTACKED

Mob attacks 2 men for inquiring about illegal cattle transport

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

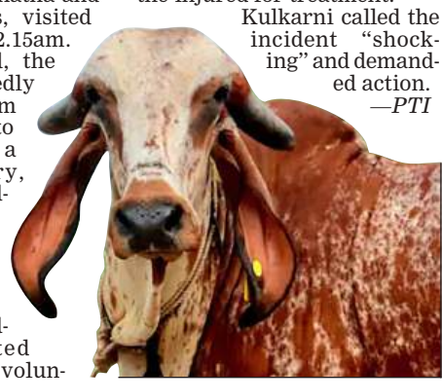
Two individuals were reportedly assaulted by an unidentified group during an investigation into alleged illegal cattle and camel transport on the outskirts of the City, police said on Saturday.

The incident took place late Friday night at Medimallasandra village under Anugondanahalli Police Station limits. A case has been filed based on a complaint by Sanjay Kulkarni, an honorary Animal Welfare Officer with the Animal Welfare Board of India.

According to the FIR, Kulkarni received intelligence that over 20 camels and several cows were kept at Medimallasandra for slaughter during Bakrid. Acting on this, Kulkarni, accompanied by volunteer Manjunatha and four police officers, visited the location at 2.15am. When they arrived, the animals had allegedly been moved. The team then proceeded to another site near a plywood factory, where they reportedly found 10 cows being kept illegally.

At this location, a large group of unidentified individuals assaulted Kulkarni and the volunteer with fists, stones, and sharp weapons, causing injuries to their necks, faces, and heads. The police later shifted the injured for treatment.

Kulkarni called the incident "shocking" and demanded action. —*PTI*



Teen files POCSO case against boxing coach

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

A 50-year-old boxing coach has been booked under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act for allegedly sexually abusing a 17-year-old trainee in the City, Sampangiramanagar police said on Saturday.

The FIR was registered based on a complaint filed by the girl's mother. The coach allegedly misbehaved with the trainee in his private room during a competition in Chennai on 17 May and threatened her against disclosing the incident. The teen had trained under the man for 10 years and allegedly faced inappropriate behaviour for the past four years. —*PTI*

'Hindu civilisation declined due to political subjugation'

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

Political subjugation and internal shortcomings were among the major reasons for the decline of Hindu civilisation, UPSC Secretary Shashi Ranjan Kumar said on Saturday.

Speaking at an event in Bengaluru on his book, 'The Decline of Hindu Civilization: Lessons from the Past', he stressed that the concept of 'Anvikshaki', or critical inquiry, formed the foundation of Indian intellectual traditions.

India's history is not merely a chronicle of political transitions, but a continuous journey of exploration in knowledge, science, and philosophy, Kumar said, noting achievements in mathematics, astronomy, medicine and philosophy.

He noted that India contributed the concept of "zero" and understood negative numbers before Arab mathematicians.

But "the rich intellectual traditions waned due to political subjugation and internal flaws," he argued.

"The collapse of a civilisation is rarely the result of a single isolated event; rather, such tragedies occur due to the accumulation of numerous small, uncorrected mistakes," Kumar cautioned.

The event was organised at Central College of Bangalore University by various colleges and sociations. —*PTI*

Are saffron shawls allowed in KVs in BJP states? Bangarappa

MYSURU, 23 MAY

Minister for School Education and Literacy Madhu Bangarappa on Saturday defended the Congress government's decision to withdraw BJP's 2022 ban on wearing the hijab in classrooms.

Speaking to reporters in Mysuru, Bangarappa said the move was in line with the Congress party's 2023 assembly election manifesto, and that the BJP was politicising the issue.

Bangarappa also alleged that the BJP was polarising students based on religion and distracting from real public issues.

"Let BJPs leaders look at how Kendriya Vidyalaya schools run by the Union government conduct classes. Are students in states under BJP governments allowed to wear saffron shawls in classrooms in Kendriya Vidyalaya?", he asked. BJP leaders have been calling upon Hindu students to wear saffron shawls after the ban on religious symbols was revoked.

He criticised the Union government for its mismanagement in conducting NEET exams this year and the alleged paper leaks that followed, disturbing 24 lakh students across the country.

Bangarappa further responded to BJP leaders for questioning his educational qualification and his command on the Kannada language.

He said that he had completed his Pre-University Course (PUC) education, emerged as a successful entrepreneur, promoted Kannada films, provided jobs, and been involved among other social welfare activities.

"Let BJP leaders question the educational qualification of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," he said.

Further, he added that the State would not implement the National Education Policy (NEP) as it would "saffronise" education in the State. —*Salar News*

'B-SMILE didn't get permission for 9 proposed flyovers'

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

BJP MP Tejasvi Surya has alleged that Bengaluru Smart Infrastructure Limited (B-SMILE) failed to obtain mandatory approvals for several proposed elevated corridor projects across Bengaluru. In a letter to B-SMILE Director (Technical) BS Pralhad, Surya said the projects had not secured clearance from the Bengaluru Metropolitan Land Transport Authority (BMLTA).

The proposed projects include a 7km elevated corridor from Minerva Circle to Hudson Circle estimated at Rs 557.23 crore, a 5.3km corridor between Sholay Circle and St Johns Road costing Rs 519 crore, and a 5.2km elevated corridor from Old Madras Road to Electronic City estimated at Rs 852 crore.

Other proposals include elevated corridors near Town Hall, KR Circle, Kanakapura Road and Tumakuru Road.

"In the absence of independent scrutiny, it remains uncertain whether these flyovers are effective or based on scientific planning," Surya stated. He claimed that the Detailed Project Reports (DPR) for the projects have not been made public, and sought their release. —*Salar News*

AFTER ASSESSMENTS

Police decided to deny permission for CJP event: HM

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Saturday said that the police took an independent call on denying permission for the proposed event of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) after assessing law and order and other relevant aspects.

Responding to questions on Bengaluru police cautioning against the "peaceful human chain" programme near town on 24 May, Parameshwara said that the police thoroughly assessed the circumstances around proposed events, include who is organising it and what it is being organised for. "Based on that assessment, the police decide whether or not to grant permission. If they have denied permission, there must be some reason".

The X account of the CJP, a satirical digital outfit, came up last week and is believed to be connected to remarks made by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) where Justice Surya Kant reportedly likened certain youth to "cockroaches.

The Cockroach Janta Party, linked to the CJI's recent remarks, was launched last week and went viral —*x*

He dismissed speculation that he was seeking a change of portfolio amid a propsed Cabinet reshuffle.

"I have no dissatisfaction at all. I have efficiently handled the Home Department. Altogether, if you combine the three-year and two-year terms, it has been eight years in the Home Department," he said. "If they give me an additional portfolio, I will manage it." —*PTI*

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Chadha to head RS Committee on Petitions

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha, who recently switched from the AAP to the BJP, has been appointed as the new Chairman of the Committee on Petitions of the Upper House.

The reconstitution of the committee was announced by Rajya Sabha Chairman CP Radhakrishnan, who nominated 10 members, including Chadha. The panel has been reformed with effect from 20 May.

Besides Chadha, members include Harsh Mahajan, Gulam Ali, Shambhu Sharan Patel, Mayankkumar Nayak, Masthan Rao Yadav Beedha, Jebi Mather Hisham, Subhasish Khuntia, Rwngwra Narzary, and Sandosh Kumar P. —*PTI*

Rubio pushes for US energy exports to India amid war

Says India an 'incredibly important' partner

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Washington wants to sell India "as much energy as they'll buy", underlining a renewed push to expand American energy exports amid growing global uncertainty triggered by the Iran conflict.

During talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi, Rubio discussed the Middle East crisis and stressed that the US would "not let Iran hold the global energy market hostage". American officials said US energy exports could help diversify India's energy supply at a time when disruptions through the Strait of Hormuz have sharply affected global oil flows.

After meeting Modi, Rubio described India as an "incredibly important partner" and said both countries were preparing "important announcements" in the coming months to further strengthen ties. He later attended an event at the US Embassy in New Delhi.

Rubio arrived in Kolkata earlier in the day and visited the Mother House, headquarters of the Missionaries of Charity founded by Saint Teresa, before travelling to the capital. He is scheduled to hold bilateral talks with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Sunday before visiting Agra and Jaipur. Rubio will return to New Delhi on Tuesday for the Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting. The visit comes just over five weeks after Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri travelled to Washington DC to stabilise ties strained by tariff disputes and disagreements over claims surrounding last year's India-Pakistan conflict.

Ambassador to India Sergio Gor, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio with his wife Jeanette Dousdebes Rubio visit the headquarters of Saint Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity on Saturday in Kolkata — ***PTI***

Trade remains a key issue in bilateral relations. The US goods trade deficit with India rose to $58.2 billion in 2025, up 27.1 per cent from 2024. Trump has repeatedly pushed for greater Indian purchases of American goods, including energy, aircraft, technology and agricultural products.

Despite earlier tensions, both sides are continuing negotiations on a broader bilateral trade agreement after reciprocal tariffs on Indian goods were reduced earlier this year. —*PTI*

SIR: 75% of voters mapped with 2003 rolls in Jharkhand

RANCHI, 23 MAY

Jharkhand Chief Electoral Officer K Ravi Kumar on Saturday said the parental mapping of 75 per cent of voters with that of the 2003 electoral rolls has been completed in the run-up to the SIR exercise, scheduled to begin on 20 June in the state.

The list of all unmapped voters will be displayed at all polling booths from Saturday, he said.

All mapped voters would not need to submit any additional documents for the ensuing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise.

Jharkhand now has 2.64 crore voters.

He appealed to the electors to visit their respective polling centres and check their names in the unmapped voter list, he said. Kumar said people whose names appear in the unmapped list should contact their booth-level officer to get their names mapped.

The list will be available at all polling stations for the next two weeks, the CEO said, adding that on 5 August, along with the draft publication of the electoral roll, the list of absent, deceased, and duplicate voters will also be released. The list of all unmapped voters will be released on 23 May, the CEO said. —*PTI*

AMID 'TMC SCAMS'

WB CM to enact new job, land policies

KOLKATA, 23 MAY

Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari on Saturday said his government will introduce a new recruitment policy in the next Budget session of the assembly. He further said his government has directed concerned departments to hand over land to the railway authorities for completion of 61 stalled projects in the state.

Adhikari noted that courts had to intervene in various recruitment scams during the previous Trinamool Congress (TMC) government, leading to the cancellation of 26,000 school jobs. He added that the recruitment process in the state government will emulate central government organisations like the Railways.

Meanwhile, he stressed that the railway projects, stalled due to land allotment issues, need to be completed to improve connectivity in the state. He added that their hastening is a positive impact of the "double engine" government, the term being used by Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) leaders to refer to the party being in power at the Centre as well as in a state.

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw had in February said that total work worth Rs 92,974 crore is under progress in West Bengal, covering track creation, station redevelopment and safety enhancements. —*PTI*

MoS Sukanta Majumdar, West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari, state BJP MLA Ritesh Tiwari and others after attending the 19th edition of Rozgar Mela, in Kolkata —***PTI***

Crime is crime: Bihar DGP snubs CM's 'caste' jibe

PATNA, 23 MAY

Bihar DGP Vinay Kumar stated that crime has no connection with caste. He responded to remarks made in the context of a political statement on police encounters. This statement followed Bihar Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary's remark suggesting police should ask a criminal's caste before opening. He CM said, "Some people are saying that caste should be asked during a police encounter. Ask the caste before you open fire. What common sense is this?" He emphasised police action against criminals, stating, "If anyone challenges police, they must be answered within 48 hours." —***PTI***

Int'l ties structured to serve India's youth: PM

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said India's international partnerships are being structured to benefit the country's youth through employment generation, technological advancement and global exposure.

Addressing a virtual 'Rozgar Mela' after distributing appointment letters to over 51,000 newly recruited central government employees, Modi said India's youth would play a crucial role in achieving the vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047.

Referring to his recent five-nation visit to the UAE, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Italy, the Prime Minister said global leaders and corporations had expressed strong confidence in India's young workforce and technological progress.

"The world wants to be a part of India's development journey," Modi said, adding that every international agreement signed by India was aimed at creating opportunities for Indian youth.

He outlined agreements reached with the five countries, including cooperation in semiconductors, water management and advanced manufacturing with the Netherlands; artificial intelligence and digital innovation with Sweden; green technology and maritime cooperation with Norway; strategic energy and technology partnerships with the UAE; and defence, critical minerals and science and technology collaborations with Italy.

Modi highlighted the ASML-Tata Electronics agreement as a major step in strengthening India's semiconductor ecosystem, saying it would generate thousands of jobs. He added that partnerships in AI, supercomputing, green energy, shipbuilding and sustainable manufacturing would create new opportunities for engineers, technicians and skilled workers. The Prime Minister also stressed the importance of infrastructure, ease of doing business and startup growth in generating employment. He noted that India has become the world's third-largest startup ecosystem.

The Rozgar Mela was organised at 47 locations nationwide, with recruits joining departments including railways, home affairs, health and financial services. —PTI

BENGAL GETS RS 3,000 CR FOR HEALTHCARE REVAMP

KOLKATA, 23 MAY

West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari on Saturday announced that his government has received Rs 2,103 crore from the Union Health Ministry for the National Health Mission for the current financial year, to revamp the public healthcare sector in the state. The Centre has also allocated its share of Rs 976 crore for the Ayushman Bharat scheme for this fiscal year, he said, adding that Rs 500 crore has already been transferred.

Cards for the Centre's Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme are likely to be distributed to beneficiaries in the state from July this year, the CM added. The chief minister said that the state could soon ask the Centre for inclusion in the Ayushman Arogya Mandir network for migrant residents of the state.

He further announced that the health department would ramp up recruitment of doctors, nurses and other healthcare service workers in state-run health centres. —*PTI*

TMC councillor found dead in Kolkata

KOLKATA, 23 MAY

The body TMC councillor Sanjay Das, 50, was found hanging in his residence in Kolkata on Saturday, police said, adding that it looked like a suicide, although no note confirming this has been recovered yet. Das is believed to have been a close aide of Debraj Chakraborty, a TMC councillor who had been questioned by the CBI about the alleged recruitment scam at the primary level in state-run schools. Several people close to him have been arrested recently. —***PTI***

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

—*ANI*

Security up at WB jhalmuri stall after owner gets threats

KOLKATA, 23 MAY

Security has been heightened at the 'jhalmuri' stall in Jhargram of West Bengal, after its owner received death threats following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit last month, police said. Bikram Kumar Sau, who runs the stall near Raj College More, lodged a complaint alleging threatening calls and messages from individuals claiming to be from Pakistan and Bangladesh since 17 May, threatening to kill him and blow up his stall. Sau reported that some persons, in a WhatsApp video call, brandished firearms and issued threats. He said, "I was terrified after receiving repeated threats. My family members were also scared." Police are investigating, assisted by cybercrime experts, and have deployed CAPF personnel and CCTV cameras to ensure Sau's safety. —***PTI***

BJP SEES RED

Kerala poll officer appointed as CM's secretary

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

BJP and CPI(M) lambasted Congress after the Kerala state government, led by the party, appointed state Chief Electoral Officer Rathan U Kelkar as secretary to Chief Minister VD Satheesan.

The Marxist party alleged that Election Commission acted in a "biased and suspicious" manner in favour of the Congress-led United Democratic Front alliance, during the assembly polls. It further claimed that both the BJP-led Centre and the Congress-led Kerala government were undermining the neutrality and credibility of the Election Commission through political interference.

Meanwhile, senior BJP leader K Surendran accused the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of hypocrisy.

"In West Bengal, when the BJP did the same, it was described as a reward for vote theft. But in Kerala, when V D Satheesan does this, it becomes the beauty of democracy," Surendran said in a social media post.

The criticism by the BJP and the CPI(M) comes in the backdrop of Gandhi attacking the new BJP government in West Bengal over the appointment of former state Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Agarwal as chief secretary.

KPCC president Sunny Joseph said there is no politics behind Kelkar's appointment. State Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala said the government was fully empowered to appoint capable officers to key administrative posts. —*PTI*

'Op Toofan' to fight drug menance in Kerala

T'PURAM, 23 MAY

Kerala Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala on Saturday announced a statewide anti-narcotics campaign titled "Operation Toofan: The Narco Hunt", aimed at cracking down on drug syndicates. The minister announced the initiative after chairing his first high-level meeting of senior police officers at the Police Headquarters in Thiruvananthapuram.

Chennithala said the special drive would begin from 1 June, coinciding with the reopening of schools after summer vacation, and would focus on eliminating drug distribution networks, especially around educational institutions. He warned of strict action against those involved in the sale of tobacco products and narcotic substances near school premises.

Describing narcotics, especially synthetic drugs, as a growing threat in Kerala, he said the police would launch an intensified operation in the coming days to uproot the drug menace from the state. "All those connected with narcotics activities will be brought under police surveillance," he said.

The minister said the campaign would particularly target synthetic drug supply chains and repeat offenders through intelligence-based and data-driven enforcement measures with the support of police forces in other states.

Seeking the support of the media and the general public in efforts to rein in the drug mafia, he said violators of the law and those who challenge the system would not be tolerated.

Chennithala also announced a series of reforms aimed at improving police functioning and public accessibility in police stations across Kerala. —*PTI*

Lok Sabha Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Kerala CM VD Satheesan and MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra in New Delhi on Saturday—***PTI***

- Chennithala said the special drive would begin from 1 June, coinciding with the reopening of schools after summer vacation, and would focus on eliminating drug distribution networks.

VIRAL VIDEO ROW

UP Cong Chief booked for 'abusing' Modi

MAHOBA/LUCKNOW, 23 MAY

Uttar Pradesh CongressCchief Ajay Rai has been booked for allegedly making objectionable remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a programme in Mahoba district, police said on Saturday, after an FIR was lodged at Kotwali Nagar police station.

According to complaint filed by BJP worker Neeraj Rawat, the programme held on 22 May at Samad Nagar locality.'

It was organised by former Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee secretary Brijraj Ahirwar. He alleged Rai arrived with a convoy of 15–16 vehicles and 25–30 supporters, causing obstruction to traffic and disrupting normal movement in the area.

He further alleged that Rai used abusive and objectionable language against the Prime Minister, with a video of the incident going viral on social media. Leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party, including Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and state president Pankaj Chaudhary, strongly condemned the remarks.

Uttar Pradesh Congress President Ajay Rai —***PTI***

- Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee secretary Brijraj Ahirwar. alleged that Rai used abusive and objectionable language against the Prime Minister, with a video of the incident going viral on social media. BJP Leaders strongly condemned the remarks.

Rawat claimed the remarks hurt public sentiments and triggered anger among BJP workers, leading to social tension. He also submitted a pen drive containing the purported viral video as evidence and demanded legal action against Rai and others.

Rai, however, dismissed allegations, calling the video fake and AI-generated by the BJP, and said he would file a complaint in Lucknow. Political row in Uttar Pradesh following Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's remarks targeting Modi, Amit Shah and RSS at Raebareli rally, with complaints in Lucknow involving Dinesh Pratap Singh also. —*PTI*

NO FINAL AGREEMENT YET

Centre offers legislative body for Ladakh

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Activists said Saturday that the Centre offered constitutional safeguards under Article 371 and a legislative body for Ladakh instead of Sixth Schedule status, but no final agreement has been reached.

This came after a meeting between representatives of the Leh Apex Body (LAB), Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) and a Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) sub-committee on Friday. Activist Sonam Wangchuk said talks focused on Ladakh's statehood demand, with the committee proposing a governance structure for the whole region, not just district councils. He said it was only an in-principle understanding.

Wangchuk said the Centre's concern over statehood was Ladakh's ability to fund administration through its own revenue, adding that studies were assessing its economic capacity.

KDA member Sajjad Kargili said the Centre also proposed legislative, executive, administrative and financial powers for Ladakh, and was asked to share a formal draft for expert consultations. He said the proposal needed examination.

Kargili said that the process remained at a preliminary stage. "Dialogue is also positive,"he said.—*PTI*

—ANI

Record Rs 48 cr worth weed seized at IGI airport

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Customs officials at IGI Airport have seized suspected hydroponic weed worth approximately Rs 48 crore from two Thai nationals arriving from Bangkok. The Delhi Airport Customs Commissioner, Arvind Saran, called it one of the largest narcotics recoveries at any international airport in recent years. He stated, "Customs officials at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport are maintaining strict round-the-clock vigil to check attempts to smuggle drugs and other prohibited items." The two passengers, intercepted after crossing the Green Channel on 22 May, had their baggage examined following profiling inputs. Officials recovered six vacuum-sealed packets, weighing around 29kg from one passenger and 19kg from the other. *—PTI*

Eight-year-old girl raped in UP village

SHAHJAHANPUR, 23 MAY

An eight-year-old girl was allegedly raped by a man in a village here, police reported on Saturday. The incident occurred on Friday evening when the girl was out buying items. According to police, the accused, a local resident, lured her through nearby fields and took her to a tubewell, where he reportedly assaulted her. The victim returned home and narrated her ordeal to family members, who then approached the police. The girl has been sent for a medical examination at a government hospital. A case has been registered based on the family's complaint, and efforts are ongoing to arrest the absconding suspect. *—PTI*

Elephant runs amok in Thrissur, damages property

THRISSUR, 23 MAY

A wild elephant caused chaos in a residential area of Thrissur city, Kerala, on Saturday morning. The elephant, returning from a temple, became agitated and ran through the neighbourhood, damaging vehicles, walls, and trees while creating panic. Nobody was injured. The elephant overturned a woman's car, which she was travelling in, before leaving the area. TV visuals showed the elephant flipping the vehicle onto its side after raising it with its tusks. The woman, Sangeetha, was rescued and uninjured. Forest officials, led by Minister Shibu Baby John, dispatched an elephant squad and planned to tranquilise the animal if needed. Some media personnel reported being assaulted and their equipment damaged while covering the incident. *—PTI*

Punjab realtor nabbed for fraud

CHANDIGARH, 23 MAY

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested a real estate businessman in a money laundering investigation linked to submission of alleged fake consent letters for obtaining Change of Land Use (CLU) from the Punjab government, officials said on Saturday.

They said the accused, Ajay Sehgal, also Secretary of Indian Cooperative House Building Society (ICHBS), was taken into custody on Friday.

ED raided Sehgal, premises linked to the Suntec City project (developed by ICHBS). An FIR was registered based on a complaint received from farmers whose consent was "forged" to obtain the CLU. Sehgal allegedly prepared "fake" consent letters for 30.5 acres owned by 15 people. *— PTI*

People dub fuel price hike 'big blow', seek regulation

Citizens are worried about its impact on livelihood

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

The repeated increase in petrol and diesel prices across the country has drawn sharp reactions from the public, with many describing it as a major burden on middle-class families and daily commuters while urging the government to regulate fuel prices.

Delhi residents raised concerns over the increase in fuel prices, with no effective increase in income. Some held the government responsible for the hike and for dismissing the public concerns.

"It's affecting the middle class. Petrol prices are increasing. It's a loss. But what can we do? People who have work will have to use a car. People are carpooling as asked. But petrol is expensive. There is no alternative. Electric cars are so expensive. People are not able to buy them," a local said. Another resident highlighted the financial pressure caused by rising fuel costs.

The Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) prices have also been increased by Rs 1 per kg with effect from Saturday, reportedly issued by Indraprastha Gas Limited (IGL), adding to the commuting burden for users of CNG-powered vehicles.

Expressing concerns over the issue, the residents, as well as the taxi drivers in Delhi said that the increase in prices does not mean an increase in fares for them.

Meanwhile, residents in Hyderabad, Telangana, also raised concerns over the impact of rising fuel prices on "middle-class families and daily wage workers."

"The government must regulate this because it directly impacts the middle class and daily wage earners. If green fuels like CNG also become unaffordable, people will lose the incentive to switch to cleaner energy, which defeats the whole purpose," another local said.

Another local expressed grave disappointment over the repeated hikes in fuel prices, stating that it has increased the cost of living. *—PTI*

Twisha's husband in police custody; 2nd autopsy to be done

BHOPAL, 23 MAY

A local court on Saturday remanded Samarth Singh, husband of former actor-model Twisha Sharma and an accused in her alleged dowry death case, in police custody for seven days. His mother and co-accused Giribala Singh said police were yet to contact her for recording her statement in the high-profile case.

A four-member team of doctors from AIIMS Delhi was slated to fly to Bhopal in the evening to conduct a second autopsy of Twisha following the Madhya Pradesh High Court's order.

Samarth, who had been absconding for 10 days after an FIR was registered against him and his mother following Twisha's death by hanging, was arrested on Friday after he reached the Jabalpur district court to surrender. He had withdrawn his pre-arrest bail petition filed in the High Court earlier.

Twisha, 33, was found hanging at her matrimonial home in Bhopal's Katara Hills area on 12 May, following which an FIR was registered against her husband, who is a lawyer, and her mother-in-law and former district judge Giribala Singh for alleged harassment for dowry. Giribala is the chairperson of the Bhopal District Consumer Court.

She could not step out of her house owing to chaos, she said, apparently referring to the presence of mediapersons.

A day earlier, the High Court issued a notice to her on pleas seeking cancellation of her anticipatory bail, and sought her response by 25 May. Bhopal Police had issued a third notice after she allegedly failed to appear. *—PTI*

Delhi fire tenders face public ire for delay in dousing blaze

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Debris is seen after a fire broke out at a furniture market, in Shastri Park, New Delhi *—PTI*

A massive fire broke out in northeast Delhi's Shastri Park furniture market late in the night, gutting several shops and causing losses worth lakhs of rupees, Delhi Fire Service officials said on Saturday.

Angry locals pelted stones at fire tenders over alleged delay in response to the fire that broke out on Friday night. Firefighting operations continued through the night and no casualties were reported in the incident.

According to the Delhi Fire Service (DFS), a call regarding the blaze was received at around 11.57 pm on Friday.

The fire erupted in the furniture market located near New Seelampur metro station and quickly spread across the area due to the presence of highly combustible material, a DFS official said.

At 12.50 am, police assistance was sought after some members of the public pelted stones at the firefighting teams during the operation, he said.

A total of 25 fire tenders were rushed to the spot to douse the flames, the official said.

The exact cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained and the cooling operation is underway.

Delhi Fire Service officials said the fire erupted at the furniture market near New Seelampur metro station. It spread rapidly due to combustible material such as wooden furniture and plywood.

"The department received the information about the blaze at 11.57pm and fire tenders were dispatched immediately," a DFS official said.

"The fire was later categorised as a medium category blaze. Wooden furniture and plywood were the main combustible materials at the site. Nearly 25-26 fire tenders were deployed to douse the fire," the official further added. *—PTI/Agencies*

Army chopper crashed in Leh, 3 survivors get clicked

LEH, 23 MAY

A senior Indian Army commander and two pilots survived a helicopter crash in the high-altitude Ladakh sector on May 20, prompting the military to launch a formal investigation into the incident.

An Indian Army Cheetah light helicopter, operating in the strategically sensitive Ladakh region, met with an accident during a routine flight. The helicopter was carrying three personnel, including Division Commander Major General Sachin Mehta, along with two pilots.

All three occupants sustained injuries when the aircraft went down.

The Cheetah helicopter, a staple of high-altitude logistics and reconnaissance for the Indian Armed Forces, has been the subject of ongoing technical scrutiny due to its ageing fleet.

To determine exactly what went wrong, the military has institutionalised a formal probe. A Court of Inquiry has been officially ordered to investigate the technical, mechanical, or environmental factors that led to the accident. *—ANI*

Division Commander Major General Sachin Mehta takes a selfie with two pilots after surviving the crash in Leh *—SCREENGRAB*

NEET leak: Illegal classes in Latur face crackdown

LATUR, 23 MAY

Latur's connection to the NEET-UG 2026 paper leak and subsequent investigation by the CBI has prompted the district administration to order a crackdown on illegal coaching classes, some of them operating from industrial units, and related infrastructure.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has arrested 11 accused, including retired professor PV Kulkarni and Renukai Career Centre director Shivraj Motegaonkar.

The district administration has begun tightening its grip on the city's controversial 'coaching classes area', officials said.

On Friday, the Zilla Udyog Kendra (District Industries Centre) issued directives ordering the immediate closure of all commercial activities running illegally in industrial sheds allotted for manufacturing purposes within the Latur Industrial Estate Co-operative Society.

The move comes shortly after the CBI arrested Pune-based Manisha Havaldar for allegedly leaking Physics questions of the NEET examination.

According to the official letter issued by the District Industries Centre on 22 May, the action was initiated following a meeting chaired by the Latur District Collector. *—PTI*

Nagaland takes steps to contain ASF; bans pork sale

KOHIMA, 23 MAY

The Nagaland government has intensified surveillance and containment measures following the outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF), while several districts have imposed bans and restrictions on the import, transport and sale of pigs and pork products.

The Directorate of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services has been monitoring the situation through district veterinary officers and field staffers who are engaged in surveillance, containment, awareness campaigns, sample collection and implementation of bio-security measures to prevent spread of ASF, an official statement said here.

In Mon, the administration has imposed a temporary ban on the sale of pork and prohibited the import, export and transportation of live pigs.

In Dimapur district, authorities have identified infected and surveillance zones after ASF-positive cases.

The directorate clarified that ASF is a highly contagious viral disease affecting pigs, but it does not infect humans and is not a public health concern. *—PTI*

M'rashtra temple trusts plan stir over act targeting their lands

THANE, 23 MAY

The Maharashtra Mandir Mahasangh will launch a statewide agitation on Sunday, demanding the withdrawal of the proposed State Devasthan Inam Abolition Draft Act, 2026, claiming it targets properties of Hindu temples while excluding Waqf land from its purview.

The draft statute aims to grant ownership rights to tenants and occupants of lands historically owned by temple trusts. It proposes resolving pending disputes and unlocking 400,000 hectares of land. However, it is facing stiff opposition from Hindu organisations.

- The draft statute aims to grant ownership rights to tenants and occupants of lands historically owned by temple trusts

The Mahasangh on Saturday claimed that more than 300 memorandums had been submitted to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy CM Eknath Shinde, ministers, and district collectors demanding the unconditional withdrawal of the draft law.

The Mahasangh is a state-level coalition of temple trustees, priests, and religious organisations, which aims to unite temple administrations, protect religious properties, and standardise temple culture.

The organisation claimed the proposed law will snatch the historic lands granted to deities by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and other royal dynasties, according to a release.

Alleging religious discrimination, the Mahasangh stated that Section 1 of the draft excludes Waqf Board lands from its purview.

The Mahasangh claimed that the government has assured them of convening a meeting with Revenue Minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule to address the issues. *—PTI*

REACHES CIVIC BODY OFFICE

Dressed as cockroach, Mathura man protests Yamuna pollution

MATHURA, 23 MAY

At the civic body office in Mathura, a crowd gathered to watch social activist Deepak Sharma dressed as a cockroach *-X/DHARM*

Miffed by the pollution in the Yamuna river, a man here reached the municipal corporation office dressed as a cockroach, singing and dancing, much to the amusement of those present there.

Clad in a cockroach costume, social activist Deepak Sharma warned on Friday that if the issues were not addressed promptly, the condition of the Yamuna would worsen in the days to come.

Sharma said he was compelled to dress as a cockroach to open the eyes of the "incompetent" officials, who have virtually turned a blind eye to the pollution.

Municipal officials did not comment on the incident, which followed the launch of the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP). A satirical social media account, the CJP has launched a campaign demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the NEET-UG paper "leak".

The platform surfaced last week following a controversy over remarks attributed to Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant about "cockroaches" and "parasites" during a court hearing on the 'senior' designation for a lawyer.

The CJI later clarified that his observations, directed at individuals entering the legal profession using "fake and bogus degrees", were misquoted.

"Be it Mathura or Vrindavan, polluted water and sewage from filthy drains can be seen flowing openly into the river. Yet, the officials remain indifferent," Sharma said. *— PTI*

Centre publishes draft rules for VB-G RAM G

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

The Centre on Saturday published draft rules under the Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025 (VB–G RAM G) for public consultation, following the notification of the law's implementation across all states and Union Territories from 1 July.

The draft rules have been placed in the public domain to facilitate wider stakeholder consultation before they are finalised. The proposed rules cover transitional provisions, the National Level Steering Committee, Central Gramin Rozgar Guarantee Council, administrative expenses, grievance redressal, payment of wages and unemployment allowance, and expenditure in normative allocations. *— PTI*

Volleyball player beaten over relationship dies

FARIDABAD, 23 MAY

A volleyball player from Rajasthan was allegedly abducted and beaten to death by the family of a minor girl with whom he was in a relationship, officials said on Saturday.

The deceased was identified as **Monu**, 21, a resident of Saidpur village in Rajasthan's Bhiwadi, while the girl is a resident of Faridabad.

An FIR has been registered based on the complaint by the deceased's family. Two suspects have been detained.

It has been alleged in the complaint that the girl's family kidnapped Monu, kept him tied up in the house for three days, starved him and beat him continuously. His family claimed that he was thrown out in a half-dead condition.

- It has been alleged in the complaint that the girl's family kidnapped Monu, tied him up for three days, starved him and beat him

He was subsequently admitted to a hospital where he died during treatment, police said.

A Faridabad police spokesperson said based on the complaint, a case has been registered and the entire matter is being investigated. *—PTI*

RISKING LIFE FOR WATER

Climbing down a 45-foot-deep well just to fetch two pots of water, while risking life with every descent, has become a daily reality in Kaprada taluk of Valsad district, Gujarat. Despite government claims of providing clean drinking water to every household, severe shortages persist in the region, ironically known as the "Cherrapunji of Gujarat" for receiving the state's highest rainfall. In Berasta Faliya hamlet of Moti Palsan village, home to 1,200 people, all eight wells have dried up. Women descend into the deep well using ropes and iron ladders to collect water seeping through rock fissures—*SCREENGRAB*

Indians to be hit hard as US changes Green Card rule

The Trump administration's new immigration policy could dramatically reshape the future of thousands of Indians living and working in the United States, particularly skilled professionals on H1B visas waiting for permanent residency.

Under a new policy memo issued by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), foreign nationals on temporary visas who wish to obtain a Green Card will now, in most cases, be required to return to their home country to complete the process through consular processing. Adjustment of status within the US, long used by international students, tech workers and families, will now be treated as an "extraordinary form of relief" granted only in limited circumstances.

The move has triggered anxiety across the Indian diaspora, which forms one of the largest and most professionally significant immigrant communities in America. According to the Carnegie Endowment, more than 5.2 million people of Indian origin currently live in the United States.

For decades, many Indian professionals on H1B and L1 visas were able to remain in the US legally while their Green Card applications were processed. The new rules could now force them to leave the country for months, or even years, while waiting for interviews and approvals at US consulates in India.

USCIS spokesperson Zach Kahler defended the change, saying it restores the "original intent of the law".

"We're returning to the original intent of the law to ensure aliens navigate our nation's immigration system properly," Kahler said. "An alien who is in the US temporarily and wants a Green Card must return to their home country to apply, except in extraordinary circumstances."

Under the old rules, Indian professionals on H1B and L1 visas were able to remain in the US while their Green Card applications were processed —*PIXABAY*

The administration argues that the policy will reduce pressure on USCIS resources and shift much of the workload to US consulates abroad. However, immigration lawyers and Indian professionals warn the changes could severely disrupt careers, families and long-term residency plans.

One of the biggest concerns is employment uncertainty. Indian workers in the technology, healthcare and engineering sectors often depend on continuous legal status tied to their jobs. Leaving the US for consular processing could interrupt employment, especially if companies are unwilling or unable to permit long-term remote work from India.

Families may also face significant upheaval. Many Indian migrants have spent years building lives in the US — buying homes, enrolling children in schools and establishing financial stability. Returning to India during processing could force families into prolonged separation or compel entire households to relocate temporarily with no certainty over when they may return.

The policy is also expected to place enormous pressure on already overburdened US consulates in cities such as Mumbai, New Delhi and Hyderabad. Visa appointment backlogs remain a persistent problem, and immigration experts fear thousands of additional Green Card interviews could overwhelm the system further.

That could leave applicants stranded in India for extended periods while waiting for appointments or decisions. Lawyers warn there is no guaranteed timeline for returning to the US once an applicant leaves for consular processing.

Another major concern is the broad discretion built into the policy. USCIS has said adjustment of status inside the US will only be permitted in "extraordinary circumstances", but it remains unclear exactly what qualifies.

Potential exemptions may include severe medical emergencies, extreme hardship involving US citizen family members, or cases deemed to be in the national interest. Kahler later indicated that individuals who "provide an economic benefit" may still be allowed to continue on their current path.

Yet immigration attorneys say the lack of clarity has created widespread confusion. Skilled foreign workers, including those on H-1B visas, remain uncertain whether they will qualify for exemptions or be forced into overseas processing.

There are also fears over the risk of denial. If an applicant travels to India for consular processing and their Green Card application is delayed or rejected, returning to the US may become difficult because temporary work visas can conflict with demonstrated "immigrant intent".

The uncertainty has already prompted reactions from prominent figures in India's technology industry. Zoho founder Sridhar Vembu publicly urged Indians on US work visas to consider returning home permanently.

Responding on X to a post from the US Department of Homeland Security, Vembu wrote: "Once again, my appeal to Indians in America on a visa. Please come home."

He described the new policy direction as disrespectful towards Indian professionals and argued that self-respect should outweigh economic sacrifice.

"Even if you feel it is hardship and sacrifice, self-respect should dictate your course. Let's make Bharat proud," he said.

The backlash appears to have prompted some softening within the administration. Reports suggest USCIS is now drafting clearer exemption criteria and considering carve-outs for highly skilled workers and applicants in critical industries.

Until those guidelines are finalised, however, immigration lawyers are advising Indian nationals to avoid unnecessary international travel and monitor USCIS announcements closely.

For the hundreds of thousands of Indians already navigating America's notoriously slow Green Card system, the new rules threaten to make an already difficult process even more uncertain. —*Salar News*

SALAR سالار

'Mountain' of plastic collected at Pune's hill fort

A voluntary group based in Junnar taluk of Pune undertook a three-day cleanliness drive over the last weekend at the iconic Harishchandragad fort in Maharashtra. Around 55 members of the Shivneri Trekkers Association, a non-profit group of adventure and history enthusiasts, collected 115 sacks of plastic waste and five sacks of liquor bottles from the surrounding areas of the fort.

Perched in the Sahyadri mountain range, Harishchandragad is regarded as one of Maharashtra's most historically and ecologically significant hill forts. Members of the trekking group said the region is rich in flora and fauna, with frequent sightings of the Indian giant squirrel, locally known as 'shekaru', along with leopards and spotted deer.

Located at an altitude of over 3,500 feet above sea level in the ecologically sensitive Western Ghats and surrounded by dense forests, the fort is favoured by hardcore trekkers, adventure enthusiasts and social media users alike. Tourists flock there during the harsh summer months as well to witness the cloud formations around the Kokankada cliff, a dramatic escarpment popular among photographers.

The area has been staring at an ecological problem as a large amount of plastic waste discarded by such visitors can be seen lying around on its premises.

The situation is more or less similar at many other forts in the state that are linked to the history of Maratha empire founder Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.

Nilesh Khokrale, president of the trekking group, said the drive involved volunteers aged between 10 and 70 years and resulted in the collection of an estimated 1.25 to 1.5 tonnes of plastic waste and around 225 to 250 kilograms of glass liquor bottles.

The discarded plastic lying around the ancient temple and cave complex, Taramati Peak, Kokankada and several popular trekking routes was collected, he said, adding that a significant amount of such waste still remains scattered across inaccessible cliffs, slopes and remote sections.

The waste was later handed over to the forest department for disposal.

Another major concern raised during the drive was the continued burning of plastic waste. Volunteers claimed there is no scientific waste-processing mechanism in place and that collected garbage is often burnt locally by stall owners and those handling disposal.

Environmental experts have repeatedly warned that open burning of plastic releases toxic pollutants and damages fragile hill ecosystems.

Harishchandragad falls within an ecologically-sensitive and historically significant zone, making coordinated management difficult in the absence of a dedicated conservation authority or sustainable tourism policy.

The trekking group said volunteer drives alone cannot solve the problem unless authorities introduce permanent waste-management systems, stricter regulation of commercial activity on forts, and accountability mechanisms for both tourists and vendors.

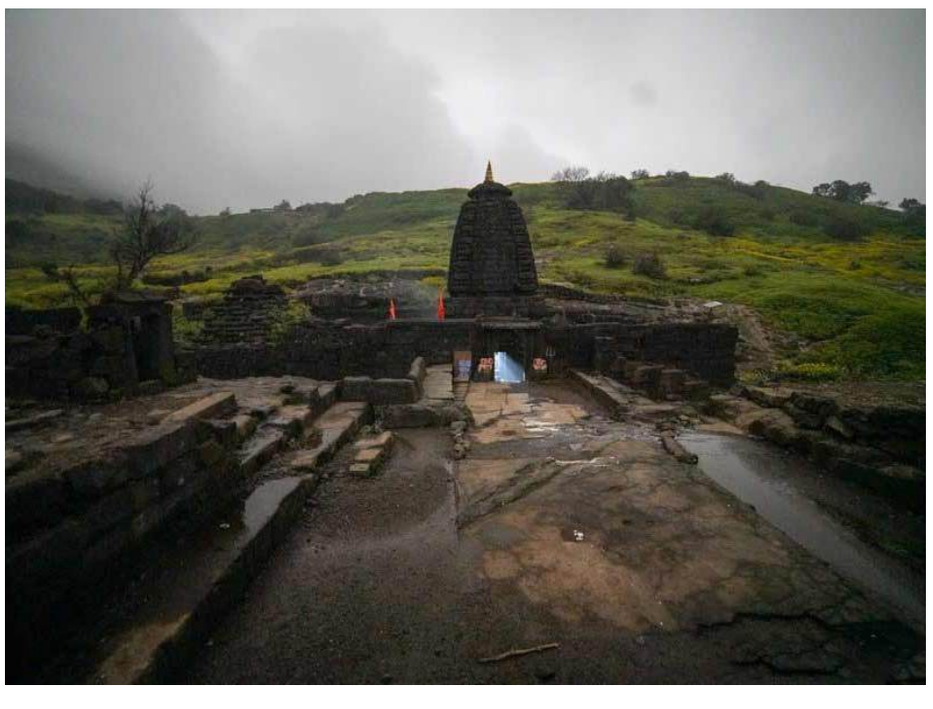
Sharada Shinde, vice-president of the group, said such trekking destinations should be declared plastic-free zones.

"Plastic bottles and wrappers discarded at adventure tourism spots are washed down by rain and floods, polluting streams and rivers. The state government should take strict measures to prevent this," Shinde said.

Hrishikesh Yadav, executive president of the Akhil Maharashtra Giryarohan Mahasangh (AMGM), the apex body for mountaineering, trekking and adventure sports organisations in the state, said authorities should develop a viable economic model to tackle waste disposal, especially plastic waste, as adventure tourism destinations are witnessing a sharp rise in footfall.

Ashok Pawar, assistant conservator of forests, Nashik range, told PTI that authorities have struggled to control plastic waste because multiple routes lead to the top of Harishchandragad, although a plastic-crushing unit has been installed on one of the most frequently used routes.

The scale of the problem reflects a broader environmental challenge confronting popular forts and trekking circuits across Maharashtra, including forts like Raigad, Sinhagad, Rajgad, and Kalsubai Peak, where tourism infrastructure is struggling to keep pace with the surge in visitors driven by social media and weekend travel trends. —*PTI*



Perched in the Sahyadri mountain range, Harishchandragad is regarded as one of Maharashtra's most historically and ecologically significant hill forts —*MAHARASHTRA TOURISM*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Punjab village bets on football to keep children away from drugs

At a Punjab village known as much for its fight against drugs as for its growing football culture, a grassroots academy has quietly emerged with focus on one simple idea, keeping children on football fields and away from the streets.

Youth Football Club (YFC) in Rurka Kalan, Jalandhar, believes in developing players from the ground up, hoping to make a contribution, however small it may be, in the growth of Indian football which is currently grappling with myriad problems such as uncertainty over domestic league structure, lack of commercial partners, salary delays, etc.

The academy, which bagged India's runners-up finish at the Street Child World Cup 2026, currently trains 250 children free of cost while also taking care of hostel, food and dietary requirements.

The academy now operates 14-15 centres across Punjab, reaching to 4,000 to 6,000 children.

Former India defender Anwar Ali, who coached the side at the Street Child World Cup, believes Indian football's biggest problem continues to be the neglect of grassroots development despite the financial rise brought by Indian Super League (ISL).

"There is quantity but not quality because we don't work at the grassroots level," Anwar told PTI.

"Countries like Uzbekistan used to play with us and now they have reached the World Cup. We only think about the top level reaching I-League, ISL and playing for India."

Anwar, who represented India during one of the country's brighter phases between 2008 and 2011, said Indian football had gradually drifted into a comfort zone despite improved professionalism.

"Players are getting good money and we have come into a comfort zone. Nobody tries to go outside," said Anwar who had rubbed shoulders with the likes of Bhaichung Bhutia and Sunil Chhetri.

Anwar also weighed in on the debate surrounding OCI (Overseas Citizen of India) players after Ryan Williams became one of the few overseas-born players to represent India after acquiring Indian citizenship.

"If we want OCI players to keep developing in other countries and then come here if things don't work out there, then where are we developing our own players?" Anwar said.

"Maybe it can help for the next two to five years with 10-15 players, but it is not a long-term solution."

The former India international also highlighted the lack of opportunities for Indian forwards in domestic football while explaining the overdependence on Sunil Chhetri over the years.

"We are not getting No. 9 or No. 11 players because where are Indian No. 9s playing in ISL or I-League? Nobody gets a proper chance," he said.

"When Chhetri and we were playing, there were players like Sushil, Balwant, Robin Singh and JJ () as No 9s Where are such players now?"

Anwar also candidly addressed the issue of age fraud, which according to him remains one of the major reasons why India's youth-level success often fails to translate at senior level.

"I will answer this straight forward. I don't want to target any team or anyone. But the question is: is the under-15 or under-17 team actually under-15 or under-17?

"This is because of age fraud. In under-17, sometimes a 21-year-old player is playing. So obviously results will come at youth level, but later the reality comes out."

Anwar's comments came during a felicitation ceremony organised for India's Street Child World Cup team, which lost 4-2 to Brazil in the final but earned praise for its spirited campaign.

For YFC founder Gaurmandal Das, however, football was never only about producing elite players.

"The aim behind this academy is to help promote football across grassroots and also make it accessible to kids," Das said.

"We also aim to make Punjab drug free as this will also help in that. The facility is free and have almost 250 children practising here during season with their food and dietary needs taken care of well."

Das said the academy had once considered turning into a professional club before deciding that investing in grassroots football would create a much larger social impact.

"We thought of making this a full-time club and not just academy but we thought that the effort we'll put in just those 20 odd players will not yield us more fruitful avenues than investing time on grassroots," he said.

That larger vision reflected strongly in the outlook of the young players as well.

Captain Silas, who admires Kylian Mbappé and Ousmane Dembélé, said the final against Brazil highlighted the difference in speed and decision-making.

"Losing 4-2 Brazil in the final given their history is fine but we made it really hard for them to score but at the end their quick thinking and swift movement was just too much for us," he said.

"These things will help us grow, we want more such experiences to help know each other better and bond well," teammate Aakash added.

The team's top scorer Jashanpreet, meanwhile, was already dreaming big. The youngster said he hopes to one day break Chhetri's record for most international goals for India. —*PTI*

Youth Football Club in Rurka Kalan, Jalandhar, believes in developing players from the ground up, hoping to make a contribution, however small it may be, in the growth of Indian football—*YOUTH FOOTBALL CLUB*

QUOTE of THE DAY

Doctor, I do not mind being called a brilliant, total tyrant dictator, but I do not want to be called dumb

—DONALD TRUMP, US President

The site of the explosion at the Liushenyu coal mine in China's Shanxi Province, on Friday —XINHUA

90 killed in coal mine blast in China

Carbon monoxide leak suspected; 123 injured

BEIJING, 23 MAY

Ninety people were killed in a gas explosion in a coal mine in China, according to an official media report. The gas explosion occurred at the Liushenyu coal mine at 7:29 pm on Friday. This is the worst mining disaster in the country in nearly two decades, with 123 others injured.

At least nine people were still trapped underground and rescue efforts were still ongoing at the time of publishing.

The accident occurred in a coal mine in in Qinyuan County, north China's Shanxi Province, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. A total of 123 people were sent to hospitals for treatment, including two in critical condition and two in serious condition, while 33 others have returned home.

The cause of the accident is yet to be confirmed. According to Xinhua, local authorities were initially alerted after an underground carbon monoxide sensor in the mine – operated by the Tongzhou Group – was triggered.

The people responsible for the company involved in the mine accident have been placed under control in accordance with the law, Xinhua added.

Chinese President Xi Jinping called for proper handling of the aftermath of the accident and sought a thorough investigation into its cause, with accountability pursued in accordance with the law.

Xi has stressed that authorities across the country must learn from the accident, remain vigilant on workplace safety, and intensify efforts to identify and eliminate potential risks to prevent major accidents.

As China enters its flood season, Xi also called for strengthened emergency preparedness and solid flood control and disaster relief measures to safeguard people's lives and property. Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing has led a team to the site to oversee the rescue efforts. —*Agencies*

China's Chang'e-7 mission to survey moon's south pole

BEIJING, 23 MAY

China's upcoming lunar mission, Chang'e-7, will conduct environmental and resource surveys of the Moon's south pole, the China Manned Space Agency announced. The mission will involve orbiting, landing, roving, and hopping to explore the region for water ice and assess its potential for future research bases. The probe was delivered to Hainan for pre-launch preparations in April, with work progressing as planned. China's lunar programme aims for a crewed landing by 2030, following successful missions like Chang'e-6's sample return from the Moon's far side in 2023. China is also integrating its crewed and uncrewed lunar efforts. —*PTI*

Lankan top monk accused of child abuse gets bail

COLOMBO, 23 MAY

A senior Sri Lankan Buddhist monk, Pallegama Hemarathana, has been released on bail after being detained on suspicion of sexually abusing a 14-year-old girl. The 71-year-old, who is the custodian of eight major Buddhist sites, was arrested earlier this month, but spent time in hospital citing health issues. The court in Anuradhapura ordered both him and the girl's mother, accused of aiding him, to be released. Hemarathana denies any wrongdoing. The case has sparked debate in Sri Lanka, where over 70 per cent of 22 million people are Buddhists, and monks hold significant influence. Activist Hemamali Abeyratne emhasised justice regardless of social status. The case resumes next month.—*PTI*

Troops deployed after 7 killed in Colombian dispute

BOGOTA, 23 MAY

Colombian forces have deployed over 500 soldiers to Silvia in the southwest after a violent land dispute between two Indigenous groups left at least seven dead and over 110 injured. The soldiers and air support aim to stabilise the area and prevent escalation, the army said. Defence Minister Pedro Sánchez reported that most injuries resulted from gunfire, warning the toll could rise. The conflict involved the Misak and Nasa groups, both claiming the same territory. Colombia's National Land Agency seeks to mediate and clarify territorial boundaries. The UN called for invesitgations into the violenec linked to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) active in the region.—*PTI*

Nepal's 'Elephants in the Fog' wins Cannes jury prize

CANNES, 23 MAY

Nepali film "Elephants in the Fog" has made history by winning the Un Certain Regard Jury Prize at Cannes, becoming Nepal's first award at the festival. Directed by Abinash Bikram Shah in his debut, the film also marks Nepal's first selection in the segment. It portrays the lives of transgender women in a rural Nepalese village, focusing on Pirati, a matriarch who dreams of escaping her community. Shah said, "cinema has the power to look into the shadows," dedicating the award to his team. The film's cast includes Pushpa Thing and Deepika Yadav. Austria's 'Everytime' got the top prize.—*PTI*

Iran, Oman discuss 'permanent Hormuz tolls'

TEHRAN, 23 MAY

Iran and Oman are in talks on whether to implement a permanent toll system in the Strait of Hormuz, according to an American media report. Iranian state-media, on the other hand, reported that Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and his Omani counterpart Badr Albusaidi held talks on the phone aimed at reducing tension and a peace agreement.

The New York Times reported that Iran is seeking legal guarantees to ensure that it can generate revenue from ships traversing the crucial waterway, which lies between it and Oman. Under international law, charging tolls is prohibited.

Iran has recently created the Persian Gulf Strait Authority that formalised the "toll system". However, Iran is looking to call the payment a "fee", that is legal in international law as it is often linked to ports.

Notably, this comes as Pakistan's Field Marshall Asim Munir met Araghchi in Tehran on Friday and held talks with Parliamentary Speaker Mohammad Ghalibaf, amid a diplomatic push. —*PTI*

Man with Iranian ties planned to kill Ivanka: Report

WASHINGTON, 23 MAY

An Iraqi man, Mohammad Baqer Saad Dawood Al-Saadi, was arrested for allegedly plotting to assassinate US President Donald Trump's first daughter Ivanka Trump earlier this month, according to to the New York Post

The 32-year-old man was allegedly trained by the IRGC and sought revenge for the strike that killed Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani, the Post claimed. Donald had ordered the strike in 2020, in his first term.

Al-Saadi possessed a blueprint of Ivanka's Florida residence and allegedly posted online threats warning Americans that "neither your palaces nor the Secret Service will protect you."

He was arrested on 15 May in Turkey and extradited to the US. —*ANI*

US President Donald Trump posted an AI image of his upcoming $1.2 trillion 'Golden Dome' sheild around the White House —TRUTH SOCIAL@REALDONALDTRUMP

Trump 'seriously considering' launching strikes on Iran: Report

WASHINGTON, 23 MAY

US President Donald Trump is "seriously considering" launching fresh strikes against Iran if last-minute negotiations do not result in a peace deal, US media outlet Axios reported on Friday. This comes days after the same publication claimed a deal was imminent.

The report claimed that that Trump met with a senior national security team on Friday morning to discuss the war on Iran.

A US official described the negotiations as "agonising" with drafts "going back and forth every day" without much progress, it claimed.

Sources said that Trump had grown increasingly frustrated about the negotiations with Iran over the past several days.

On Tuesday, he told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he wanted to give diplomacy another chance, but by Thursday night, he was leaning toward ordering a strike, sources told Axios. —*PTI*

Sharif leaves for China on four-day visit

ISLAMABAD, 23 MAY

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday departed for Hangzhou, China, in the first phase of his four-day visit to promote ties with Beijing and celebrate the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties.

He will meet CEOs of Chinese companies, and will discuss the CPEC Phase 2 with officials, according to a statement by the PMO. Several agreements are expected to be signed. Sharif will then depart for Beijing, where he will meet Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang. —*PTI*

After Tulsi steps down, Lukas becomes US National Intel head

WASHINGTON, 23 MAY

US President Donald Trump on Friday announced that Aaron Lukas will take over as acting Director of National Intelligence following Tulsi Gabbard's resignation from the post of intelligence chief after her husband was diagnosed with a rare form of bone cancer. Present Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence Lukas will serve in the post after Gabbard steps down on 30 June.

In a post on X, US Vice President JD Vance said Gabbard was a patriot and "a great asset to the administration" as well as "a loyal confidante." United States Senator Lindsey Graham appreciated Gabbard's service and said he will be praying for her. Acting Attorney General Todd Balnche thanked her for her sacrifices for the country. Turning Point CEO Erika Kirk hoped for divine peace to surround Gabbard.

US Senator for California, Adam Schiff, noted how Gabbard politicised intelligence and dismantled critical agencies keeping Americans safe.

During her tenure, Gabbard reduced the size of the agency and dismantled diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programmes within the intelligence apparatus. —*ANI*

US Presidend Donald Trump posted an AI generated video of him throwing Stephen Colbert into a dustbin after the comedian's 'Late Show' was cancelled after backlash from the Republican; Trump posted a bizarre image of him looking over the Arctic region with the caption 'Hello, Greenland'. He had previously threatened to take over the country —TRUTHSOCIAL@REALDONALDTRUMP

Ukraine strikes Russian oil facility

MOSCOW, 23 MAY

A Ukrainian drone attack caused a fire at another Russian oil terminal overnight, local officials in Russia's Krasnodar region said Saturday, in what appeared to be the latest attack on Moscow's vital oil industry.

Authorities in the city of Novorossiysk said falling drone debris sparked a fire at an oil terminal, injuring two people.

Russia's Astra news outlet said Ukrainian drones struck the Sheskharis oil terminal and depot, the terminus for Russian state-controlled pipeline company Transneft's main oil pipelines in the region. Images posted by Astra appeared to show smoke rising above the oil terminal.

"The facility provides shipment of oil and oil products for export and is involved in meeting the needs of the Russian army," the Ukraine's General Staff stated on Telegram, adding that Ukrainian forces had also hit a tanker in the Black Sea belonging to Russia's so-called "shadow fleet." Ukraine has said Russia's oil exports fuel its "war economy".

Meanwhile, the death toll from a Ukrainian drone strike overnight into Friday on a college dormitory building in Russia's occupied-Starobilsk rose to 18, with 60 wounded. President Vladimir Putin has called the attack a "crime". —*PTI*

40,000 evacuated in S California over chemical tank leak

GARDEN GROVE, 23 MAY

Approximately 40,000 people are under evacuation orders and schools have closed in Southern California following a hazardous chemical leak at an aerospace plastics facility. The leak involves methyl methacrylate, stored in a tank containing between 22,700 and 26,500 litres, which overheated on Thursday and began venting vapours.

The officials ordered residents in Garden Grove to evacuate and later expanded the orders to some residents in Cypress, Stanton, Anaheim, Buena Park, and Westminster. Fire Chief Craig Covey warned, "This is not precautionary. ... This thing is going to fail, and we don't know when."

Thousands of people in Orange County, California, were evacuated amid concerns that a chemical leak could lead to an explosion —SCREENGRAB

The tank could rupture or explode. Covey stated, "We are setting up these evacuations for these two options." Crews have built containment barriers using sandbags to prevent chemical runoff into storm drains and nearby water bodies. No injuries or fatalities were reported. —*PTI*

Nepal to sizzle in 'extreme heat'

KATHMANDU, 23 MAY

Several districts in southern and western Nepal are likely to face extreme heat and heat wave conditions from Saturday to Monday, disaster management officials warned.

A notice issued by the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Authority said temperatures in parts of Lumbini and Sudur Paschim provinces could cross 40 degrees Celsius during the period. Moderate heat waves are expected in Banke, Dang, Bardiya, Doti, Kailali and Kanchanpur districts.

The Department of Hydrology and Meteorology forecast dry weather on Saturday and Sunday, with chances of light rainfall in some Terai and western districts on Monday. Meteorological officials said the Terai region has not received rainfall for the last 8-10 days, causing temperatures to rise steadily.

Authorities advised people to remain cautious as high temperatures and heat waves could lead to serious health problems. Sudur Paschim and Lumbini provinces generally record temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius or more during summer.

Notably The affected districts are near India's Uttar Pradesh, which is currently facing extreme heat conditions.

In Nepal, pre-monsoon showers usually start from February end and continue till May. —*PTI*

'OUTBREAK MORE THAN REPORTED'

NE Congo bans large funerals due to Ebola spread

Red Cross workers at a health centre to transport people who died of Ebola in Rwampara, Congo —PTI

BUNIA, 23 MAY

Authorities in northeastern Congo banned funeral wakes and gatherings of more than 50 people on Friday in an effort to curb a rapidly spreading Ebola outbreak.

Medical workers in the region have struggled with few resources and pushback from angry residents, due to misinformation or medical policy clashing with local customs. On Thursday, a treatment centre was set ablaze by angry youths who were blocked from retrieving the body of a friend who apparently had died of Ebola due to contagion concerns.

- A Red Crescent Societies officials said that the window for containing the outbreak is closing

The WHO said that the outbreak now poses a "very high" risk for Congo but that global risk remains low. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said 82 cases and seven deaths have been confirmed in Congo, but that the outbreak is believed to be "much larger".

The region's already-weak health infrastructure has been weakened by international aid cuts and armed conflict.

The UN said it released USD 60 million from its Central Emergency Response Fund to accelerate the response. The US has pledged USD 23 million in funding to further bolster it, adding that it would fund the establishment of up to 50 Ebola treatment clinics in the affected regions.

"The outbreak can still be contained but the window for action is narrow," Gabriela Arenas from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said. —*PTI*

Govt opens race for 50 tech parks for Rs 33,660 cr

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

The Centre announced a four-month period for states to submit applications for establishing 50 industrial parks under the Rs 33,660 crore Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna (BHAVYA) scheme. The scheme, approved by the Union Cabinet on 18 March, aims to develop 100 plug-and-play industrial parks nationwide, boosting manufacturing and economic growth. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said applications for 20 parks are encouraged in the first two months, and for 30 in the following two. The parks, ranging from 100 to 1,000 acres, will receive up to Rs one crore per acre for infrastructure, with states also able to partner with private sector players. The scheme seeks to fast-track industrial development while also enhancing regional supply chains across India —*PTI*

Goyal to lead delegation to Canada for FTA talks

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Commerce and Industry Minister announced he will lead a delegation of over 150 members to Canada on 25-27 May to seek investments and promote free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations. He plans to meet Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, Canadian Foreign Minister Maninder Sidhu, and representatives of the "Maple 8" pension funds, which manage assets worth about 2.4 trillion Canadian dollars. Goyal said, "I will meet them to attract investments." He highlighted Canada's strengths in oil, gas, minerals, and India's talented workforce. Currently, around 600 Canadian companies operate in India, with a target to increase this to 1,000. The aim is to raise bilateral trade to USD 50 billion in five years from USD 8.66 billion in 2024-25 —*PTI*

NO NATIONWIDE FUEL SHORTAGE: INDIAN OIL

Says supply issues at some outlets are 'highly localised'

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), the nation's largest oil firm, on Saturday said there was no overall shortage of petrol and diesel in the country and described fuel outages reported at some retail outlets as "highly localised".

The state-owned fuel retailer attributed higher demand at certain outlets to three factors: a seasonal rise in diesel consumption during the harvesting season; customers migrating from private pumps where prices were relatively higher; and increased institutional purchases at public sector outlets, as bulk fuel was being priced in line with elevated international rates.

The company said petrol sales during May increased by 14 per cent year-on-year, while diesel sales increased by around 18 per cent, reflecting "sustained and exceptionally high" growth in demand that it continued to meet across the country.

In a statement, IOC said only a "very small number" of outlets in its network of more than 42,000 fuel stations had witnessed supply disruptions, while stocks and supplies at the majority of pumps remained normal and adequate.

A viral video shows long queues at Maharashtra's Buldhana district earlier this week as diesel supply resumed after several days of alleged shortage –IG

The higher demand being witnessed at some locations is attributable to "seasonal increase in diesel demand during the ongoing harvesting period.

Further, temporary shift of customers from certain private retail outlets, owing to relatively higher retail prices at some private pumps, and increased migration of institutional and commercial demand to PSU retail outlets, as bulk and institutional supplies are currently priced significantly higher in line with prevailing international market prices".

IOC added that state-owned oil marketing firms continued to maintain sufficient fuel inventories nationwide and were taking steps to address isolated disruptions and ensure uninterrupted supplies.

It also urged consumers to avoid panic buying, reiterating its commitment to maintaining seamless fuel availability across the country.

"IndianOil, along with other oil marketing companies (OMCs), continues to maintain adequate overall stocks and supplies of petrol and diesel across the country," the statement said. —*PTI*

PRICE VARIATIONS

VAT, cess drive fuel costs up in non-BJP states

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Despite uniform central excise, consumer fuel prices continue to vary from one state to another. The primary driver of this disparity is the difference in Value Added Tax (VAT) and state government-imposed cess, with non-BJP and India-bloc ruled states imposing higher levies on retail consumers.

Fuel prices vary by state due to differing VAT rates and local levies. BJP-ruled states generally have lower petrol and diesel prices because of relatively moderate taxes. In contrast, several non-BJP and India-bloc ruled states have implemented higher VAT structures, road cesses, and social security levies, resulting in significantly higher costs for ordinary citizens.

Despite recent fuel price revisions by OMCs, opposition-ruled states such as Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Kerala remain among India's costliest fuel markets, with petrol priced around Rs 116 per litre in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and above Rs 113 in parts of Kerala due to high VAT and additional state levies.

Some of the lowest petrol prices are in BJP-ruled states such as Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana, where moderate taxes and the absence of heavy local cesses keep rates between Rs 95-98 per litre. Delhi, Goa, and Assam also maintain comparatively lower prices.

Regional price disparities have come into sharp focus following fuel price revisions by oil marketing companies. Petrol prices rose by Rs 4.74 per litre and diesel by Rs 4.82 per litre, driven by climbing global crude prices amid geopolitical tensions in West Asia.

The Centre moved to cushion the impact through excise cuts, reducing its central collection margins. —*ANI*

Gold jewel volumes drop

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

India's organised gold jewellery sector is expected to hit a decadal-low in sales volume this fiscal due to high prices and a sharp customs duty hike, according to Crisil Ratings. The sector's sales volume, including jewellery, coins, and bars, is forecast to decline 13-15 per cent year-on-year, reaching 620-640 tonnes—the lowest in a decade, excluding the Covid-19 impacted 2021.

The decline follows the government's decision to more than double customs duty on gold to 15 per cent from 6 per cent, aiming to curb imports and demand amid high prices. Despite falling demand, revenue is projected to grow 20-25 per cent, driven by higher realisations.

Domestic gold prices surged 55 per cent last year due to global price rises and geopolitical tensions. With prices around Rs 160,000 per 10 grams, realisations will be 35-40 per cent higher this year. Investment demand has increased, with sales of gold bars and coins rising over 50 per cent.

Retailers expect higher inventory costs but stable cash flows, with a projected 20 per cent increase in EBITDA. They are expanding cautiously into Tier 2 and 3 cities while maintaining stable credit profiles supported by improved revenues. —*ANI*

FOR DUPING INVESTORS

SEBI cracks down on finance influencer

MUMBAI, 23 MAY

S SEBI has once again cracked down on a finance influencer (finfluencer) for allegedly using social media platforms to dupe retail investors. Sebi has issued an interim order against a group alleged to have manipulated stock prices through coordinated recommendations on X, Telegram, and WhatsApp, while booking profits by offloading shares onto unsuspecting investors.

"This is an interim order being passed during pendency of investigation as it has been noted that Noticees had prima facie engaged in fraud, manipulation and unfair trade practices," the order said.

The 234-page order named seven individuals, led by Hemant Gupta, Rohan Gupta and Aniket Gupta, who allegedly operated a scheme involving "fraud, manipulation and unfair trade practices" across 82 stocks, especially SME platforms.

According to SEBI, the operators first accumulated shares in select companies before aggressively promoting them through social media handles such as "@WealthSolitaire" and "@desiwallstreet", which together had more than 54,000 followers. The regulator alleged that once retail participation pushed prices higher, the accused entities sold their holdings and earned wrongful gains estimated at Rs 20.25 crore.

In one case involving Afcom Holdings Ltd, SEBI said the group's combined gross trade value nearly doubled — from Rs 548.62 crore in the pre-examination period to Rs 1,023.40 crore during the examination period — while combined profits reportedly jumped 242 per cent to Rs 58.40 crore. —*ANI*

Estonia to serve as India's gateway to north Europe

TALLINN, 23 MAY

Estonia can act as India's gateway to northern European markets once the EU-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is in place, says Indian Ambassador **Ashish Sinha**. He states bilateral ties are strengthening, with current trade serving as a springboard for further engagement when the FTA is implemented.

Sinha said, "With the India-EU FTA, there will be far more engagement of small and medium-sized industries, and the dairy and agriculture products from Estonia will find their market in India." He added, "Estonia offers e-residency, and many Indian businessmen and high-value industrialists have taken advantage of this, with about 5,000 Indians participating."

Over 1,000 Indians have registered companies under Estonia's e-residency programme. Sinha highlighted that "Indian exports to Estonia grew and overshot their target last financial year."

He emphasised the potential stating Estonia and India have "great capacity to learn from each other."

Regarding regional security, Sinha explained that both countries are democracies supporting international law and peace, with Prime Minister Modi advocating dialogue over conflict. The relationship is on an upward trajectory, marked by high-level visits and expanded cooperation. —*ANI*

El Nino and Hormuz risks could fuel global food inflation: Report

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

A Citi Research report warns that global food inflation risks are rising due to potential disruption in the Strait of Hormuz and worsening El Nino conditions. The report states that agricultural commodity prices could face strong upward pressure over the next 6-12 months. The report highlights that agriculture markets are vulnerable to supply disruptions caused by higher energy costs, fertiliser shortages, and adverse weather linked to El Nino.

Citi Research says, "Agriculture price risks are heavily skewed to the upside over the next 6-12 months, as they face major supply risks resulting from a potential prolonged closure of the Strait of Hormuz, and from likely poor weather related to El Nino." A prolonged Strait closure could increase global production costs by sharply raising energy and fertiliser prices, leading to reduced crop yields. Citi also warns that higher fossil fuel prices could boost biofuel use, further pushing food prices up. Traded agricultural prices have already risen 13 per cent this year, with commodities like sugar, cocoa, and coffee most exposed. El Nino could cause hotter temperatures and less rainfall across Asia, impacting crop yields and tightening global food supplies. The broader food indices are already up 5 per cent through April, adding pressure on global inflation amid ongoing geopolitical tensions and supply chain concerns. —*ANI*

- The report states that agricultural commodity prices could face strong upward pressure over the next 6-12 months. The report highlights that agriculture markets are vulnerable to supply disruptions

ONGC geothermal power plant boosts Ladakh

LEH/JAMMU, 23 MAY

Ladakh is set to get India's first geothermal power project, with Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena approving an ONGC-led facility at Puga valley, located at an altitude of over 14,000 feet.

LG approved a five-year extension of the memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation for the construction of the country's first geothermal power project, officials said.

The project, to be developed at an altitude of over 14,000 feet in eastern Ladakh, aims to commercially harness geothermal energy as a sustainable alternative source of power, they said.

The earlier tripartite MoU signed on February 6, 2021, between the Ladakh administration, the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC), Leh, and the ONGC energy centre expired on February 5, 2026.

ONGC had sought an extension, citing delays caused by harsh weather conditions and difficult terrain, they said.

Considering the strategic importance of the project, Saxena approved the extension of the agreement for another five years, officials said. Under the revised MoU, ONGC will establish a 1-MWe pilot geothermal power plant in the Puga valley and prepare a detailed project report (DPR) for large-scale commercial exploitation of geothermal resources in LadakhGeothermal energy is derived from heat stored beneath the Earth's surface and is considered a renewable and low-carbon source of power, they said.

Officials said ONGC Energy Centre will deepen the existing geothermal well to 1,000 metres during the 2026 working season and subsequently drill another well of similar depth in the next phase of the project. Testing, evaluation and commissioning of the pilot plant are expected during the 2026-27 financial year, they said.

The geothermal initiative, alongside Ladakh's expanding solar energy programme, is expected to reduce dependence on conventional fuels, and strengthen it's position as a renewable energy hub.—*PTI*

MUSK VS BEZOS

SpaceX launches its biggest rocket in test flight

WASHINGTON, 23 MAY

SpaceX launched its biggest, most powerful Starship yet on a test flight Friday, an upgraded version that NASA is counting on to land astronauts on the moon.

The redesigned mega rocket made its debut two days after SpaceX CEO Elon Musk announced he's taking the company public. It blasted off from Texas, carrying 20 mock Starlink satellites for release halfway around the world. It's the 12th test. At 124 metres, the latest model eclipses the older Starship lines by several feet and packs more engine thrust.

SpaceX was hoping to avoid a repeat of last year's back-to-back launches, which ended in midair explosions that rained wreckage over the Atlantic. Earlier flights also ended in flames. The rocket that Musk is building to get people to Mars one day. But first comes the moon and NASA's Artemis program.

The last Starships lifted off in October. SpaceX's third-generation Starship — a souped-up version dubbed V3 — soared from a brand-new launch pad at Starbase, near the Mexican border. Last-minute pad issues thwarted Thursday's launch.

Starship is meant to be fully reusable, with giant mechanical arms to catch the returning rocket stages. But on this latest trial run, nothing was recovered. The Gulf of Mexico marked the end of the road for the redesigned first-stage booster, and the Indian Ocean for the spacecraft and its satellite demos.

NASA is paying SpaceX as well as Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin billions of dollars to develop lunar landers for the Artemis programme, and the two companies are racing against eachother to be first. —*PTI*

SpaceX launched its biggest, most powerful Starship yet on a test flight Friday –FREEPIK

Goldman Sachs, Societe Generale, others buy 1.3 pc stake in Paytm for Rs 963 cr

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Global financial institutions, including Goldman Sachs, Societe Generale, and Citigroup Global Markets, have collectively acquired a 1.34 per cent stake in One 97 Communications, the parent company of Paytm, from SAIF Partners and Elevation Capital for Rs 963 crore via open market transactions.

Other foreign investors participating in the transaction included Ghisallo Capital Management, BNP Paribas, Copthall Mauritius Investment, and Hong Kong-based Viridian Asset Management.

Among domestic institutional investors, Sundaram Mutual Fund (MF), Nippon India MF, Edelweiss Mutual Fund and India Acorn ICAV also bought shares of the fintech firm, as per the block deal data executed on the BSE on Friday.

These entities collectively purchased 85.98 lakh shares on the exchange, representing a 1.34 per cent stake in Noida-based One97 Communications. The shares were bought at an average price of Rs 1,120.65 apiece, taking the transaction value to Rs 963.60 crore.

Meanwhile, Gurugram-based venture capital firm Elevation Capital also disposed of 5.89 lakh shares in the fintech company. The shares were offloaded at the same price, according to BSE data.

SAIF Partners' holding in One 97 Communications declined to 12.18 per cent from 13.43 per cent. Shares of One 97 Communications on Friday declined nearly 4 per cent to close at Rs 1,112.50 apiece.

Earlier this month, Paytm reported a consolidated profit of Rs 183 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 2026, a turnaround from a loss of Rs 545 crore in the same period a year ago.

Paytm's consolidated revenue from operations rose 18.4 per cent to Rs 2,264 crore in the March 2026 quarter, from Rs 1,912 crore a year ago.

For the financial year, the company swung to a profit of Rs 552 cr in FY26 from a loss of Rs 663 cr in FY25. —*PTI*

Phogat to participate in AG selection trials: HC

HC raps WFI for calling 2024 loss 'nat'l embarrassment'

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

The Delhi High Court has given its nod to the participation of celebrated grappler Vinesh Phogat –PTI

- The court also strongly criticised the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) for acting in a "vindictive" manner against Vinesh, who had challenged the WFI circular for keeping her out of the trials.

The Delhi High Court has given its nod to the participation of celebrated grappler Vinesh Phogat in the upcoming trials for the Asian Games, saying the Wrestling Federation of India's (WFI) selection policy is exclusionary for the lack of discretion to consider an iconic player like her, who is returning from a maternity break.

A bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia ordered that the selection trials, to be held on 30 to 31 May, shall be video-recorded by the WFI and an independent observer from the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) each shall also remain present."The appellant shall be permitted to participate in the selection trials for the Asian Games, 2026, which are scheduled for 30 and 31May 2026," the court said in its order passed on 22 May and uploaded on its website on Saturday."

The policy and the circular are clearly exclusionary in nature as it does not give any discretion to Respondent No.1 (WFI) to consider iconic players like the appellant in view of the sabbatical taken on account of her maternity leave," it stated.

The court further observed that the grounds taken in the show-cause notice "appear to be pre-mediated and reopening the closed issues" and that "the appellant must be permitted to participate in the selection trials in the interest of the sport and justice".The court passed the order on Phogat's appeal against the 18 May order of a single-judge bench, refusing her immediate relief on the issue of her participation in the selection trials.

Phogat, a wrestler of international repute, was disqualified from the 50-kg category finals in the Paris Olympics in August 2024 for being 100 gm overweight in the morning weigh-in. —*PTI*

RR look to seal last IPL playoffs spot vs Mumbai

MUMBAI, 23 MAY

Rajasthan Royals would look to go full throttle in their bid to seal the last Indian Premier League playoffs spot when they take on a struggling Mumbai Indians here on Sunday.

It will be a test of resilience and fitness for both teams on a potentially hot and humid Sunday afternoon here, as the Mumbai Indians would be determined to sign off with a consolation win, while the Rajasthan Royals would be aware that a defeat would take their fate out of their hands.

The Royals are currently placed fourth with 14 points. They need to win against the Mumbai Indians, which will take them to 16 points, at least one point clear of both the Punjab Kings and the Kolkata Knight Riders, who are still in the fray. But if RR lose on Sunday, they will hope for

RR VS MI @ Wankhede Stadium , Mumbai
3.30 pm IST

both Punjab and Knight Riders to also suffer defeats in their final matches for the Jaipur-based side to have any chance of making the playoffs.The Royals have lost more than they have won in their last five outings, but they will fancy their chances of a win against MI, knowing the conditions of the venue, which has small dimensions. —*PTI*

KKR, DC LOOK FOR NOTHING LESS THAN A WIN

KOLKATA, 23 MAY

Kolkata Knight Riders and Delhi Capitals would look for nothing less than a win when they square off in the season's final league match of the IPL here on Sunday.

As things stand, sixth-placed KKR and eighth-placed DC are still mathematically alive in the race for the last available berth in the playoffs, but Sunday's contest could well turn out to be a dead rubber by the time it begins. Despite their inconsistent campaign, DC head into the match on the back of two successive wins over Punjab Kings and Rajasthan Royals. With both

sides having little to lose, they are expected to go all out for a win.

Punjab Kings, currently ahead in the race for the last playoff berth, take on already-eliminated Lucknow Super Giants on Saturday. A PBKS win would take them to 15 points and officially end Delhi's hopes, as they can only reach up

GT VS CSK @ Eden Garden Cricket Stadium , Kolkata
7.30 pm IST

to a maximum of 14 points. Even then, KKR and DC would need the Mumbai Indians to beat the Rajasthan Royals in the afternoon game. KKR, who are on 13 points, can still get to 15 with a win over DC, but Punjab hold a significant net run-rate advantage. For perspective, even if PBKS beat LSG by just one run, KKR would need to defeat DC by at least 52 runs to overhaul them on NRR. —*PTI*

Cricket Tournament inaugurated in Shanghai

BEIJING, 23 MAY

Consul General of India in Shanghai, Pratik Mathur, inaugurated the annual East China Indian Diaspora Cricket Tournament and the curtain-raiser event for the International Day of Yoga (IDY) 2026 in Shanghai on Saturday. The event was jointly organised by the Indian Association Shanghai and Nord Anglia International School Shanghai Pudong, and witnessed enthusiastic participation from members of the Indian diaspora, the international community, yoga practitioners, and cricket enthusiasts from across the East China region, according to a Shanghai Consulate statement.

Mathur said the large-scale participation in the IDY 2026 curtain raiser activities highlighted the growing global commitment towards yoga as a means of promoting wellness, harmony, and peace.—*PTI*

Super Chess Classic: Pragg draws with Vachier-Lagrave

BUCHAREST, 23 MAY

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa missed a few winning attempts and was held to a draw by Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France, even as the race for the title tightened at the end of the penultimate round of the Super Chess Classic here.

On what turned out to be another excitement-filled day, the clash between overnight leaders Fabiano Caruana of the United States and Vincent Keymer of Germany ended in a draw, while world championship challenger Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan scored his second victory on the trot over Dutchman Jorden Van Foreest Friday night.

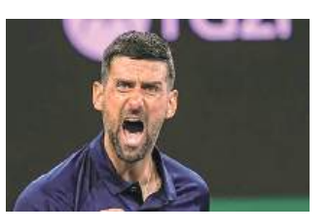
It was not a day the two Dutch GMs would like to remember as Anish Giri went down to the lowest-ranked Deac Bogdan-Daniel of Romania. Wesley So of the United States was the beneficiary of a walkover following the withdrawal of Alireza Firouzja of France earlier in the tournament.

With just the last round remaining, the race for the title has heated up with as many as five players in contention.

A play-off seems much on cards as both Keymer and Caruana have five points apiece to share the lead. Sindarov, Wesley and Foreest share the third spot on 4.5 points each, while Praggnanandhaa is now joint sixth along with Giri and Vachier-Lagrave, with each having four points in their bags. Deac Bogdan-Daniel finished his playing campaign on 3.5 points but will get a walkover in the final round to be on a fifty per cent score. —*PTI*

FRENCH OPEN 2026

Sweltering heat, revenue disagreements cloud 2nd Grand Slam of the year



PARIS, 23 MAY

The pinnacle of the clay season has arrived once again as the French Open begins on the hallowed courts at Roland Garros in Paris on Sunday.

The second Major of the year comes after an elaborate build-up. From the events in South America in February to competitions in Europe, and even Africa, across April and May, there are ample opportunities for the players to make the transition from the hard courts to terre battue.

For the 2026 edition of the French Open, a number of storylines need to be followed closely. Even before the first ball has been struck, the tournament has been shrouded in controversy. Top players have made no attempts to hide their disappointment over what the organisers claimed as increased prize money. Since March of last year, these high-profile athletes, including World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka and Jannik Sinner, as well as reigning women's French Open champion Coco Gauff, have been trying to secure a larger share of the revenue generated by the Slams. Their target was 22 per cent, but currently, the number stops at 15.

Carlos Alcaraz is pulling out of the event due to a wrist injury. The 24-year-old Italian had three match points against Alcaraz in last year's final, but the Spaniard pulled off a Houdini act for the ages to win a five hours 29 minutes long thriller in a deciding-set tiebreaker. Novak Djokovic, to complete the Career Golden Masters. Sinner, currently on a 29-match unbeaten streak, now has the opportunity to join another exclusive club, where the latest entrant was Alcaraz after his Australian Open triumph. —*PTI*

AIFF ADOPTS NATIONAL SPORTS GOVERNANCE ACT

KOLKATA, 23 MAY

All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Saturday approved the adoption of the National Sports Governance Act, but deferred a decision on the contentious matter of picking a new commercial partner for the Indian Super League during its Special General Body Meeting here.

The meeting, which was chaired by AIFF President Kalyan Chaubey, was attended by 19 Executive Committee members, 32 representatives from Member State Associations, along with representatives from FIFA and the AFC. The AIFF EC members do not have voting rights and cannot represent any member association.

"The AIFF conducted its Special General Body Meeting to deliberate upon the adoption of the National Sports Governance Act of 2025 (NSGA). During the meeting, the General Body unanimously approved the adoption of the NSGA by the AIFF," the federation said in a statement.

Subrata Dutta, chairman of Indian Football Association, the West Bengal state unit, said the AIFF constitution will now be aligned with the National Sports Governance Act 2025.

"The AIFF constitution will now be aligned with the National Sports Governance Act (NSGA) because the Supreme Court has said that the constitution submitted earlier will cease to apply once the NSGA is implemented," Dutta, who attended the SGBM, told PTI. —*PTI*

Gurindervir snatches 100m national record from Kujur

RANCHI, 23 MAY

Gurindervir Singh ran a sensational race to lower the men's 100m national record time to 10.09 seconds, clocking Asia's second fastest time this season and leaving his arch-rival Animesh Kujur stunned on a historic second day of the National Senior Athletics Federation Competition here on Saturday.

The 100m showdown between Gurindervir and the previous national record holder, Animesh, in this meet, as to who is the fastest Indian athlete, will be remembered for ages in Indian athletics.

Animesh, representing Odisha, had come into the meet as a favourite with his national record time of 10.18 seconds set last year. But on the opening day on Friday, the 25-year-old Gurindervir lowered it to 10.17 seconds in the first semifinal heat.

But just five minutes later, the 22-year-old Animesh ran 10.15 seconds in the second semifinal heat to regain his national record in dramatic circumstances. The men's 100m national record was smashed twice within minutes on Friday.—*PTI*

Mohun Bagan pulls out seven players from India squad for Unity Cup

KOLKATA, 23 MAY

Mohun Bagan Super Giant dealt a major blow to the Indian football team's campaign in the upcoming Unity Cup in London by withdrawing all seven of their players, citing earlier instances of the AIFF "refusing" to compensate for injuries suffered during matches played outside the FIFA International window. The seven players, who were part of the 28-member India squad selected by coach Khalid Jamil for the four-nation tournament, were scheduled to fly to London from Bengaluru on Sunday.

The camp was being held in Bengaluru.India is set to face Jamaica on May 27, while Nigeria take on Zimbabwe on May 26. The winners will contest the final on May 30, with the losing sides playing the third-place playoff.FIFA International match window is from 1-9 June.

A Mohun Bagan official made the club's position clear, saying the players would only be officially released once the FIFA international window begins on 1 June."Our stand is very clear players will be released only from the day the FIFA window starts," the official told PTI."We have released the players from our side, but if they travel before that on their own, we will not bear any responsibility if they get injured."

"The FIFA window starts from June 1. From that date, if a player gets injured, FIFA provides compensation. —*PTI*

Bhambri, Michael end as runners-up in Geneva

GENEVA, 23 MAY

India's Yuki Bhambri and his New Zealand partner Michael Venus finished runners-up at the Geneva Open after suffering a hard-fought defeat in the ATP 250 doubles final here on Saturday.

The third-seeded Indo-Kiwi pair lost 6-3, 6-7(7), 7-10 to Romain Arneodo of Monaco and Australia's Marc Polmans in a closely-contested summit clash that lasted nearly two hours.

Bhambri and Venus, who were playing together in their first final of the 2026 season, took the opening set, but the rivals forced a match tie-breaker after taking the second.

Arneodo and Polmans raised their level in the decider, gaining an early advantage and maintaining composure in crucial exchanges to seal the title.

Bhambri and Venus had entered the final with impressive momentum after defeating the Czech pair Petr Rikl and Adam Pavlasek 7-5, 6-3 in

BIGGEST WORLD CUP IN HISTORY

'FIFA set to strike $30-35M broadcast deal with India'

NEW YORK, 23 MAY

Indian football fans may finally be able to stream the FIFA World Cup 2026 after months of uncertainty around the tournament's broadcast rights in the country. Shaji Prabhakaran, former general secretary of the All India Football Federation (AIFF), on Saturday said negotiations for the India broadcast deal had been completed, and an official announcement is likely next week.

The deal, understood to be worth between USD 30-35 million, ensures that the biggest World Cup in history will be fully accessible to viewers across India. The development comes as a major relief for football followers in one of the world's fastest-growing sports markets.

The 2026 edition will be jointly hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico. FIFA has expanded the tournament from 32 to 48 teams, increasing the total number of matches from 64 to 104. It is expected to become the most commercially lucrative and widely viewed World Cup ever staged.

The Indian market remains crucial for FIFA despite the national team's struggles on the international stage. Football's popularity in the country has exploded, driven by the European leagues and the FIFA World Cup's massive television numbers. Cities like Kolkata, Kochi, Goa and Bengaluru continue to produce passionate football audiences, while younger viewers in Metros increasingly follow global stars and clubs.Globally, FIFA appears to have adopted a more flexible commercial strategy for some Asian territories.

The FIFA World Cup TV rights command the highest prices in Europe. —*Agencies*

FIFA WC: GITIKA TALUKDAR ONLY INDIAN WOMAN PHOTOJOURNALIST AT EVENT

HYDERABAD, 23 MAY

Although India is not participating in the men's football World Cup starting from 11 June, they will have their presence in the tournament.

FIFA has officially selected and accredited Assamese photojournalist Geetika Talukdar to cover the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup. This marks a major milestone in her photojournalism career, as it will be her third time covering the Men's FIFA World Cup.

This year, she is the only female photojournalist from India representing the Indian media team at this renowned tournament. Known for her growing presence in international sports media, Geetika Talukdar continues to represent South Asian sports media on football's biggest stage.

Before this, she has covered the 2018 Russia World Cup, the 2022 Qatar FIFA World Cup, the 2019 France Women's FIFA World Cup, the 2023 Women's FIFA World Cup in Australia and New Zealand, the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, the Paris Olympic Games, and others. —*Agencies*